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# THE MAHDI OR, LOVE AND RACE

A Drama in Story

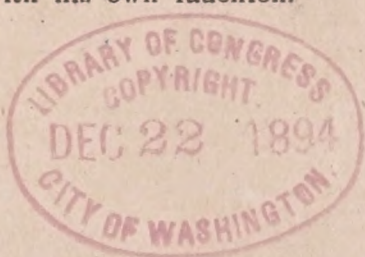
BY

HALL CAINE

AUTHOR OF

THE MANXMAN, THE DEEMSTER, CAPT'N DAVY'S HONEYMOON,  
THE SCAPEGOAT, ETC.

Love is strong, but race is stronger. It  
was a Jewish woman who destroyed  
the Captain of the Assyrians, and smote  
off his head with his own fauchion.



NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY

1894

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# THE MAHDI







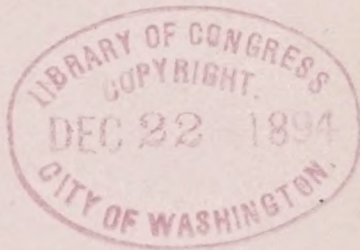
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THE present attitude of the Great Powers of Europe towards Morocco, the Sultan of Morocco, and the Moors, is, perhaps, one of the most pitiful illustrations of the story of the dog in the manger. While Spain, France, and (it must be confessed) England also stand at guard over a country which all desire and none can suffer another to possess, the most wicked indifference is shown towards the efforts of the people themselves to be masters in their own land. More than one Moorish hero lies in the prisons of Marrákesh, enduring miseries unimagined even in the "dead houses" of Siberia. But, if right is right, Morocco is for the Moors, and not for Spaniards or Frenchmen or Englishmen. To describe the efforts of an oppressed people seeking to be free, and to show that men like Hamám, the betrayed chief of the Anjerah rising, are not brutal savages outside our sympathy, but enlightened leaders struggling to shake off a cruel yoke, this short tale, "The Mahdi," has been written, as a romance and perhaps also as a prophecy.



## GLOSSARY OF MOORISH WORDS.

<i>Mahdi</i> —leader.	<i>Kaftan</i> —a coat.
<i>Mooddin</i> ( <i>Muezzin</i> ) — one who calls to prayer from the minaret of the mosque.	<i>Soolham</i> or <i>selham</i> — a cloak.
<i>Kasbah</i> —a castle.	<i>Moozoonah</i> — a Moorish coin of small value.
<i>Kaid</i> —a chief.	<i>Reefian</i> —native of the Reef Mountains.
<i>Basha</i> —a governor.	<i>Berber</i> — a tribe in Mo- rocco.
<i>Kaleefa</i> —a lieutenant.	<i>Kadi</i> —a judge.
<i>Sok</i> —market-place.	<i>Adool</i> —a notary.
<i>Sellab</i> —a male outer gar- ment.	<i>Umana</i> —revenue officer.
<i>Jidi</i> —a title of courtesy equal to "My Lord."	<i>Tarboosh</i> — the cap mis- called the fez.



# THE MAHDI.

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## FIRST PART.

### I.

ISAAC LAREDO was a Jew of Fez, but he did not live in the Jewish quarter. He had been born in the Mellah, and up to twenty years of age he had been compelled to take off his slippers and walk barefoot in the streets as often as he went by the mosques of the Muslims. But at forty he had bought up the largest house in the market-place, and was holding the proudest of the Moors in the palm of his hand. At sixty he was the richest man in the city, and was living under the "protection" of the Minister for France.

His worldly success had brought its



spiritual penalties. He had passed out of communion with his own people. His brethren distrusted him and despised him, and he repaid them hate for hate and scorn for scorn. The ostracism of the Jews made his way the easier with the Moors. They never forgot that he was an Israelite ; but the worst barriers were broken down. It was known that the best of them frequented his house without compunction, and walked with him in the streets without shame.

Nevertheless, as he grew old, the Jew in his heart grew strong. He began to think tenderly of his poor, despised, persecuted people, of the old faith of his fathers, and of the graves of his parents. Sometimes he thought he would go back to them after all. Occasionally he told himself that it might have been better if he had begged his bread from door to door.

His wife had died early, but he had a



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daughter, who had lived all her life among the Muslims. She knew nothing of the synagogue, nothing of the Torah, and nothing of the Mellah, save what she saw of it from the housetops and over the walls. Her servants were negroes ; her friends were the friends of her father ; she had no companions and no intimates. But she was rich and she was beautiful, and rumour told of certain Moorish gentlemen who were trying to forget that she was a Jew. One of these was young Omar Benani, the hare-brained son of a former Basha. Another was a very different type of man, Mohammed Abd er Rahman, a student, a devotee, a reformer, but also one of Isaac Laredo's many partners in his many businesses.



## II.

It was late in the year and late in the day, and Isaac was in his room at home casting up accounts in his private ledger. He was seated on a low stool by a stove; the well-thumbed book was rested on his knee, and his daughter stood behind sorting papers in a bureau. A warm shaft from the setting sun came through the open archway of the Moorish chamber, and fell on the bearded old man in his skull-cap and on the slim girl with jet-black ringlets.

"Pah! these Moorish spendthrifts, they'll ruin me," said Isaac. "Here's that Omar Benani, now. . . . The pigeon-hole to the left, Rachel—look for his paper."

Rachel took a paper from the bureau, glanced at the endorsement, and read: "Benani—Omar."

"That's it; read it, Rachel, read it."



The girl opened the document and read aloud :

On or before June 1st I, Omar Benani, hereby undertake and covenant, in consideration of value this day received, to deliver to Isaac Laredo, city of Fez, dominion of His Shereifian Majesty, ten tons of almonds of the value of ten dollars per hundredweight——

The girl paused and looked up. "Almonds, father? Is Omar Benani a merchant?"

"Omar Benani is an officer of revenue to the Sultan," said Isaac, lifting his head from the ledger.

"Then why the almonds?" said Rachel.

"Tut! You are a child and know nothing. No Jew in Morocco may recover money lent in usury, and so, you see——" But the old man's head was back in the book. "Ten tons, you say? At ten dollars a hundredweight—two thousand dollars. That's Omar Benani's



I O U. . . . June 1st—did you say June ?”

“June,” said the girl.

“And this is November.”

The old man counted on his fingers over the edge of the ledger. “July—August — September — October — November. The money is five months overdue. Anything there about interest ?”

Rachel looked at the paper again and went on reading :

And failing to deliver the said almonds on or before the date named, I, the said Omar Benani, do hold myself liable to the said Isaac Laredo for a further ton of almonds in consideration of each month or part of a month wherein I shall from any cause be a defaulter in respect thereof.

“Humph !” said Isaac. “Five months—five tons—ten dollars a hundredweight—one thousand dollars more. Interest and capital to date, three thousand dollars.”

He entered this item in the book, and then closed it with a sigh.



“Ah! these young rakes—they’ll beggar me yet.”

A knock came to the door, and Rachel went to answer it.

“Peace,” said the new-comer.

It was Omar Benani himself, tall, handsome, and well dressed. His breath came fast; he had been walking hard, and was visibly excited.

“My errand is urgent,” he said. “Will Rachel pardon me? May I speak with her father alone?”

“No need of that,” said Isaac. “My daughter knows all my businesses. We have just been looking over your accounts together.”

A frown crossed the young man’s face, but he made no answer.

“It is a deep indebtedness, Omar Benani,” the old man added. “Let me hope you have come to discharge it.”

“Alas! no, sir,” said Omar, “but to borrow again.”



"That is impossible," said Isaac. "I can lend no more."

"Only one thousand dollars," the young man pleaded. "Only one thousand, and I will repay you in a week."

"You are five months behind already, Sidi," said the Jew.

"One week, Isaac, only one week—I swear to you only one week more——"

"And what assurance have I——"

"My solemn word of honour."

"Humph! I would rather have better security."

The young man swallowed his anger and began again. "I owe it to the Sultan——"

"So you have been spending the Sultan's taxes as well as my money?" said the Jew.

The young man bridled up, then recovered himself, and answered quietly, "Not so. But I have been idle, and I have not gathered them; heedless, and I have not reckoned them; perhaps



merciful, and I have not exacted them. Come now, Isaac, come now ! The Sultan is a hard master, you know. Just think of it—he has sent me a message to-night that if I have so much to spend I must have something to pay, and that he must have a thousand dollars before morning, or else——”

He glanced uneasily at the girl and paused.

“Or else—what ?” said Isaac.

The young man dropped his eyes. “Or else I go to the Kasbah until all is paid.”

Isaac took a long breath. “Well, it’s your business—I cannot help you.”

“Don’t say that, Isaac. Only think—I should lie in the same prison with the worst scoundrels in the land. El Hassan is there—the man who stabbed his father last week with a pitchfork. I looked in at the door only yesterday. It was horrible—horrible ! Men in rags chained to the pillars, men with wild



eyes bolted to the walls, men with famished faces crawling on the floor. And then the gloom, the stifling air, the odour of unclean bodies—ugh!”

Isaac put out his lip, and said again, “I cannot help you.”

The young man was not to be gainsaid. “I have been a wild, reckless, headstrong fellow, a spendthrift and a fool, but I’ve not deserved a fate like that.”

“I cannot help you,” said Isaac, deliberately.

“You are rich; you have only to put your hand in your purse, and you can save me from this shame, this degradation. Come, now, Isaac, don’t be hard on a young jackass. Say the word, old friend.”

“I tell you I cannot help you.”

The young man drew back for a moment, and then, seeing Rachel by his side, he said, in a softening voice, “Rachel, you are merciful, you are compas-



sionate; your father loves you and will deny you nothing—speak for me.”

Isaac lifted his hand. “I forbid it,” he said, hotly.

There was silence for a moment, and then Omar began to laugh.

“I see how it is,” he said; “you have wanted to degrade me in the eyes of your daughter. You knew I wanted to stand well with her, and you have made me ashamed. Well, good-bye, Rachel.” He lifted her hand and put his lips to it. “Good-bye, and if ever I come out of the Kasbah——”

“I give you fair warning,” said Isaac, “that you shall not do so until *my* debt also has been paid.”

Omar laughed bitterly. “Just so, just so,” he said. “That’s the way with these Jews the whole empire over. They’re protected themselves — by France, by Spain, by Italy—and we cannot touch them. But we who are Moors in our own country, they can put us in



prison—they can grind our faces—they can suck our blood——”

Isaac had gone to the door and was holding it open. “Thank you for telling me that, Sidi. I shall remember it.”

“Then remember one thing more, old man,” said Omar. “Do your best, do your worst, but your daughter and I shall meet again.”

### III.

When Omar was gone, and father and daughter were alone, Isaac came back to the bureau, and said, in a strained voice, “Rachel!”

“Yes, father.”

“Have you ever encouraged him?”

“Never.”

“Are you telling me the truth?”

“Why should you doubt me?”

“Then why is it whispered in Fez that the daughter of Isaac Laredo——”



“If the young man is polite to me he is not the only Moorish gentleman——”

Isaac smote the bureau. “Not the only Moorish gentleman!” he repeated. “Girl, do you know what you are saying?”

Rachel did not flinch. “Omar Benani is nothing to me,” she said. “All the same, if any one loved me I should not ask, ‘Is he a Jew?’ ‘Is he a Gentile?’ And if I loved any one, it would not be because he was either one or other, but because my love came from my heart and I could not help it.”

“Ask pardon of God, Rachel,” said Isaac. “It was a Jewish mother who bore you, yet you can forget the past of your own people.”

“Love has nothing to do with the past, father,” said the girl. “It only looks to the future.”

Isaac sat down and rocked him like a man overwhelmed. “I am punished for



my fault," he said. "When you were a child I separated from my brethren, and you have been brought up among the Moors. I was Chazzan in the synagogue then, and read the Torah night and morning. I have not been a good Jew——"

"If you had been," said the girl, "you would have married me long ago to the richest young man of your own congregation. No matter if I did not love him? What does a Jewish woman want with love? No matter if I did not even know him? A Jewish woman must sacrifice herself to her race."

"Have done, child, have done," said Isaac. "God has darkened your understanding." Then turning to her as if by a sudden thought, he said, fiercely, "But if I thought . . . I have loved you tenderly; but if I imagined . . . if I once dreamt that you could look beyond our own people and marry one of these infidel Moors, I had rather . . . yes, God



is my witness—I had rather see you dead at my feet!”

Rachel’s head dropped, and she began to cry. At sight of her tears the old man softened. “Dry your eyes, child,” he said. “And if Omar Benani is nothing to you, there is no harm done, and he shall come here no more. There—there—you shouldn’t spoil your pretty face. . . . My cloak, Rachel—I have business in the Sök.”

The girl took down his cloak and helped him on with it.

“Now my staff. That’s right! . . . Crying still? Foolish child, you shouldn’t do so. . . . Rachel, come here.”

The girl came up to her father face to face.

“Answer me again—is it true—is this Omar Benani nothing to you?”

“Nothing.”

The tone was unfaltering, and Isaac was satisfied.

“Then what is there to cry about?”



Come, kiss me! . . . Omar shall go to the Kasbah—serve him right for a drunkard and a fool.”

A clock struck four.

“Tut, tut!” said Isaac. “Four o’clock, and I had business at the Adool’s at three. This foolish prattle has kept me late. Mohammed is to come at five.”

Rachel’s face brightened. “Mohammed Abd er Rahman?” she asked.

“Mohammed Abd er Rahman,” repeated the Jew. “I am losing the best of my partners to-day, Rachel, and I must go for the deed that dissolves our partnership.”

Rachel’s eagerness increased. “Is Mohammed leaving us?”

“He is—more fool he. Some qualms of conscience, if you please; some wild-goose errand, some mission——”

“Then he is going away—Yes?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t care. Truth is, I’m out of patience with the man and his crazy folly. He might have



done so well, too. Such a head, such talents, and as honest as the sun."

"Will he be long away?"

"Ask himself; he'll be here presently; keep him till I come. And, Rachel——" said Isaac, his hand on the door-handle.

"Yes, father?"

"Do you love your old father?"

"You know I do."

"And you would not shame him in the eyes of his own people?"

"Not even in the eyes of his own people."

"Then never speak again as you have spoken to-day—never, child, on your soul, never! God blesses the increase of His chosen people, but only when they marry among themselves. What has preserved us through poverty and persecution? The eternal power, the inscrutable instinct that has kept us one—one people, one faith, one race. Love is strong, but race is stronger. Remember, it was a Jewish woman who destroyed



the captain of the Assyrians, and smote off his head with his own fauchion. Good-bye, child, good-bye !”

## IV.

The night began to gather, and Rachel stirred the stove, and lit the lamp. While doing so, she paused at intervals as if listening for a familiar step. “Mohammed Abd er Rahman,” she thought, “*he* is not of our people either.” She recalled the words of her father, “Love is strong, but race is stronger,” and she shook her head. What was it to be a Jew? What was it to be a Gentile? Only to have been born in this house or in that. But love was born everywhere. It came to all houses alike. It knew nothing of a Jewish mother, nothing of a Gentile father, nothing of faith, or race, or a chosen people. “It was a Jewish woman who destroyed the captain of the Assyrians, and smote off his head with



his own fauchion." No! no! no! Love was lord, and king, and conqueror. Love was all in all.

There was a footstep on the balcony of the patio and a face appeared in the darkness of the open arch. Rachel made a little nervous cry, and then stifled it in the depths of her throat. At the next moment a stranger was in the room. His figure was strong and noble, his face was swarthy and solemn, his large eyes were the eyes of an enthusiast. He was dressed simply in the long blue jellab of his country, and he wore the tarboosh without the turban. It was Mohammed Abd er Rahman.

"My father has gone to the notary's," said Rachel. "He will be back presently. I was to keep you until he came."

"I'll wait—I have something to pay to him," said Mohammed, and he drew out a bag of money.

"Then it is true you are going to leave us?" said Rachel.



"I must," said Mohammed.

"Where are you going to?"

"First into the mountains."

"Why there?" said the girl.

Mohammed's deep voice deepened as he replied, "To prepare for my mission, to read and think and—pray."

Rachel dropped her head and said again, "And your mission—what is it?"

"To liberate my country—to emancipate my countrymen. My people are oppressed—I could wish to relieve them of their burdens. Their laws are tyrannical—I could wish to make them just. Their religion is corrupt—I could wish to purify it. Their lives are miserable, their homes are squalid, their women are slaves—I could wish to make them happy and cheerful and free."

"These are great aims," said Rachel. "Only an army could accomplish them."

"God will find it," said Mohammed.

"The man who attempts so much will be called a revolutionary," said Rachel.



“The name is a proud one,” said Mohammed.

“He will be a rebel against the Sultan.”

“The Sultan must think of that.”

“Even the people he fights for will deride him and perhaps stone him,” said the girl.

“They’ll know not what they do,” said Mohammed.

“But remember yourself,” said Rachel.

“I have worthier things to think of.”

“You might become rich——”

“I had rather remain poor.”

“You will be giving up house and home and ease and comfort.”

“God will provide for me.”

“Perhaps friendship,” said the girl.

“It is my duty,” said Mohammed.

“Perhaps—love.”

The enthusiast drew a long breath, but made no answer. With downcast eyes Rachel spoke again. “Say that some one cared for you. Say there were



barriers between you—barriers of class, and religion, and race; say she did think of that—she did not fear it—but was ready to run all risks—to face all difficulties.”

“God would reward her,” said Mohammed.

“Say she came to you and said, ‘Mohammed, do not go out on this wild errand, this endless enterprise, this hopeless adventure. You are poor—I have enough for both. You are ambitious—I can help you to rise in life. Forget your mission, and I will forget my religion, my race.’ Say that some-one said this.”

“God is merciful,” said Mohammed. “He will not suffer me to be so tried and tempted.”

“But say she did,” said Rachel, and her breath came loud and fast.

“If she asked me,” began Mohammed, “to forsake the work to which God has called me——”



"Well, well, what then?" said Rachel.

"Then," said Mohammed, "I should cut her out of my soul, though I loved her better than life itself, and it tore my heart in twain."

Rachel was crushed and ashamed. "What have I been saying?" she thought, and the hot flush mounted to her forehead.

Isaac came back, and there were curt salutations. "Leave us, Rachel," he said. "I may call you by-and-by."

Mohammed opened the door of an inner room for her. She passed through without looking at him.

"So you are quite determined?" said Isaac.

"Quite," said Mohammed.

"You have brought back the money?"

"It is here," said Mohammed, offering the bag that he held in his hand.

"And here," said Isaac, handing a document, "is the deed of our partnership."



Mohammed glanced at the paper and tore it across. Isaac counted the money and put the bag on to the bureau.

"So that is all that remains between us," said Isaac.

"Not all," said Mohammed; "I have something to say, something to ask."

"What can I do for you?"

"When I leave Fez to-night I leave my heart behind me."

The Jew lifted his bushy eyebrows, and smiled coldly.

"It is a cheerless life that is before me," said Mohammed; "a life of solitude and privation—perhaps of peril. I could wish no one to share it—least of all the woman I love. She has been delicately nurtured; she has a father who worships her; it would be selfish—it would be cruel. But if I might carry away the memory of the love she bears me—if I might say in my solitude, 'You are here and she is there, but you can feel through the distance her warm



embrace'—it would brighten the dark hours of my life alone. If I might tell myself that after all is over, and my mission is fulfilled——”

“I see—I see,” said Isaac; “you wish me to speak to her father. Is that it?”

Mohammed dropped his head.

“Come, come,” said Isaac; “don’t be afraid—who is he?”

“Yourself,” said Mohammed.

The Jew gasped, and became deadly white. Then, in a voice like the scream of a wild bird, he cried, “Rachel! You ask me to give you my daughter Rachel?”

“Only when I return,” said Mohammed; “only when my work is done.”

“I’d rather strike her dead with my own hand!” cried the Jew.

The door of the inner room opened, and Rachel herself stood on the threshold.

“Did you call me, father?” she asked.

“No; why should I?” said Isaac,



harshly. "Go back to your own room instantly."

The girl hesitated, looked doubtfully at the two men as they stood face to face, then turned about, and went away reluctantly.

There was silence for a moment after she was gone. Then Mohammed, with eyes on the ground, said quietly, "I understand you—I am not of your people. I hadn't forgotten the barrier between us; but you were not a strict Jew, I was not a straight Muslim, and I thought——"

"Then you were wrong, sir," said the old man; "I wish my child to remain a Jewish woman, and not to become the wife of an outlaw and an infidel."

Mohammed drew himself up at the insult, but commanding his anger he answered as quietly as before, "So I am fit to be your own partner, Isaac Laredo, not your daughter's husband. Yet it was for Rachel that I served you all those



years as Jacob served Laban, and she was the hope and sunshine of my life. But my love was a blunder. The breach between us is irreparable. I am severely punished for my presumption."

He was going out with heavy steps, when Isaac, who was still fuming in his passion, cried, "Wait!"

Mohammed faced back to him.

"Have you ever spoken of this to Rachel herself?" he asked.

"Never!" said Mohammed.

"Then I warn you not to do so."

Mohammed shook his head slowly, and with a smile of inexpressible sadness.

"Have no fear," he said. "I shall not appeal over your head to any love for me in your daughter's heart. I will take my answer. I will go away—I will carry my disappointment with me. I will follow the work I have undertaken. Before daybreak I shall be far in the moun-



tains. I will try to forget the heaven-blind days I have spent in this house, and perhaps a time may come when I shall think of your own words with less pain. Hard as they are I will not answer them—I will not retort them upon you, Isaac Laredo. You are a Jew, and it was a Jew who said, ‘Resist not evil.’ You are Rachel’s father also, and I give you this promise for your comfort, as long as you live, as long as your daughter is with you, no word of love shall pass between her and me——”

“And after that?” said Isaac, “what after that?”

“After that,” said Mohammed, drawing himself up and speaking resolutely, “after that, *God’s will be done.*”

He went out as he had entered, quietly, slowly, solemnly, only with head bent and eyes on the ground. While he did so, going down by the steps of the patio to the left, another man came up the steps of the patio to the right, and stood



for a moment to watch him descending. It was Omar Benani, who had come back drunk.

## V.

Isaac Laredo stood in his anger by the bureau until Mohammed's last words were spoken; then he turned about, white with rage, muttering, "Presumptuous infidel!" and came face to face with Omar, who stood grinning at him in the open doorway.

"Back again, Jew," said Omar.

"Who sent for you, sir?" cried Isaac.

Omar laughed a drunken laugh and wagged his head tauntingly. "Oh, oh! vexed are we, eh, Jew, eh?"

"Leave my house instantly," cried Isaac.

"Not I—not till you've heard what I've come to tell you. Listen! To-morrow morning I'll be pitched into prison for a debt I do not owe. You might have saved me from that degradation,



old greybeard, and you wouldn't. You denied me mercy, and by all the Saints and the Prophet you shall give me retribution. You refused me your dirty money, but as sure as I come out of the Kasbah, I'll take what you value more—I'll take your daughter. D'ye hear me, you miserly skinflint, I'll take your daughter."

"Silence, wretch!" cried Isaac, shrieking in his rage.

"You'll be dead and gone then, old man, and she'll be mine, and this house will be mine, and everything you have in the world will be mine."

"Liar! Scoundrel!" cried Isaac, his voice coming thick and hoarse.

"Choke, Jew, choke—why don't you?" cried Omar, rolling with mocking laughter.

Isaac could command himself no longer. He lifted his clenched fist and struck Omar on his grinning face.

Then Omar's eyes flashed. "Strike



me, will you, Jew? Take that, then—and that—and that,” and after every word a blow fell on Isaac’s breast with the weight and thud of a sledge-hammer.

The old man fell heavily, and Omar reeled into the room. Seeing on the bureau the bag of money which Mohammed had left, he snatched it up, laughing hideously in his drunken fury, and saying with a chuckle,

“Money! And I am to go to prison for the want of it!”

Isaac scrambled to his feet with a face fiercely distorted. “Thief! Robber! Villain!” he shrieked, and he threw himself on Omar again in his effort to grab at the bag.

There was a struggle. Omar dashed the money at Isaac’s head and cried, “Take it, then, and take my curse along with it!”

Isaac fell once more, this time with a deep groan and a gurgling cry of “Murderer, murderer!”



The lamp had been thrown over and extinguished. There was another groan out of the darkness, and then a moment of awful silence.

Omar was sobered in an instant. He threw open the stove, and a streak of dull red light crossed the body of the Jew. The face of the old man was changing. Omar knelt over it and watched it.

“Bismillah! The Prophet help me! What have I done?” he muttered.

Then a tremulous voice came from within—“Father! Father!”

“What’s that? Rachel! Allah, Allah! Where am I? I’ve killed her father!”

Footsteps were approaching. Omar listened; then, with an affrighted look, he rose and fled out of the house.

At the next moment the inner door opened, and Rachel came in, saying, “Father!”

She took one step into the darkness,



and then stopped and said, in a tremulous voice, "In the dark!"

She paused, and then called, "Mohammed!"

She paused again; her breathing was audible. "Both gone!" she said. "Then what was the noise? I'm sure I heard their voices. And what has happened to the lamp? Something fell—what was it?"

She stepped further into the room and stumbled against her father's body. "What's this?" she cried, bending over it. She saw what it was and cried, "Father! Father!" and lifted the old man's head on to her breast. "Oh, it's a dream," she thought. "It's a bad dream!" Then she cried again, "Father! Speak to me . . . tell me . . . Father! . . . Why, he is dead! . . . Someone has killed him!" She dropped the head back and picked up something from the floor. It was the bag of money—Mohammed's money. "Then it was he!



Mohammed!" she thought. "No, no! That's impossible. For shame! For shame!" She tried to think. "There was no one else," she thought. "I left them together. I heard their quarrelling. I saw them in the midst of it. . . . It was he—Mohammed—and *I loved him!*—Oh! oh! oh!"

She fell over the prostrate body and wept; then she rose with flaming eyes. All the love in her heart had turned to hate in the fierce battle of love and race, the wild tangle of chance and error. "Murderer! Assassin! Infidel!"

Mohammed was gone, but no matter. He had fled into the mountains, but that was nothing. He would escape the law. Let him. He would go on with his mission. So he might. He would become great and mighty and powerful. God grant it! But her vengeance should follow him; it should find him out; it should destroy him. At the topmost reach of his ambition, on the day when



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the dream of his life came true, her bolt should fall.

“Father, I swear it! On your murdered body I swear it, by the God of our father Jacob!”

“Love is strong, but race is stronger. It was a Jewish woman who destroyed the captain of the Assyrians and smote off his head with his own fauchion.”



## SECOND PART.

### I.

It was high fair in the Sok el Foki. The market-place of Fez was a moving mass of white haiks, grey jellabs, and Maghribi blankets. Here and there the shaven head of the Reefian; here and there the plaited crown lock of the Berber; here and there the dark gabardine and black skull cap of the Jew. Stalls, with penthouse shields, wooden booths open to the sun, wares piled up on the ground. At the back the wall of the old city, and beyond the wall the mountains cleaving the sky.

Water carriers were tinkling their bells and selling water for copper coins. A black mule-driver was crying "Arrah! Arrah!" A man on an ass was crushing through the throng and crying "Balak!



Balak!" A blind beggar was sitting in the shade of a balcony and crying "Allah! Allah!"

It was evening. The sun was setting on the domes and minarets of the mosques. Suddenly, there came a peal of noisy laughter from a lane that went off from the market-place. The murmur of voices ceased. All stopped haggling and listened.

An old woman was selling dates. "That's nothing!" she said. "How much did I say for the basket? Ten moozoonah? By the Prophet, I cannot bate it."

There was another peal of noisy laughter, and the people began to move off in the direction of the noise.

"It's nothing, I say. Only idle clowns killing time. Six, you say? I am the loser at that price. Yet come——"

She offered her dates, but the buyer had disappeared. Most of the people had gone by this time. Only the stall.



keepers were left, and they began to gather up their goods.

“No use trying to keep an honest roof over your head these days,” said the old woman, packing her basket. “Best live in a tent with those black-faced, begging, thieving Berbers—that’s what I say.”

A young man came up at the moment, dressed rakishly. His name was Othman; he kept a shop at the other side of the market-place. “So do I, O little mother,” said he. “Now look at this son of the desert, this man of the book, this brand new Mahdi——”

“Oh, it’s he again, is it?” said the old woman, with a motion of the head towards where the people had gone out.

“No, but Jellalli making fun of him.”

“Then where’s the preacher?” said another of the stall-keepers.

“The Mahdi?” said Othman. “Not down from the mountains yet. Oh,



there'll be fine doings when he comes to-night. Those black Berbers are thronging into the town by hundreds."

The old woman packed up quicker.

"Then I'll pack and begone," she said. "Plague take the black-faced, thieving Berbers out of their dirty tents."

"So say I, O little mother," said Othman.

"And plague take this Mahdi, too," said the old woman, going off.

"The demons fly away with both of them—both of them—both."

He was twisting about, laughing to himself, and unconscious of the presence of a spectator, when he came face to face with a young girl who had slipped out on to the balcony of a big house at the eastern side, and stood leaning with folded arms and looking down. The sunset was on her face. She was swarthy and beautiful.

"Oh!" said Othman, drawing up abashed.



"You did that very well, Othman," said the girl, coldly.

Othman began to stammer. "I—I didn't mean—I didn't know—you'll not mind what I said—will you, Asma?"

"About the Mahdi?"

"No, the Berbers."

The girl mimicked Othman's voice and manner. "The demons fly away with both of them—eh?"

She was laughing roguishly, and Othman joined her, nervously.

"That was only to get rid of the old black cat, and leave the place clear for a word with—somebody, you know," he said. "Besides, you are not a Berber, Asma, if your father is one. Why, it's two years since you came to live with Rachel, the Jewess—ever since Isaac Laredo died."

"Why aren't you at the bazaar to-day?" said the girl.

Othman looked astounded. "Haven't



you heard the commotion? Jellalli has come—Jellalli, the poet.”

“That lying good-for-nothing! What for?”

“To make a mock of the Mahdi—so there’s likely to be sport to-night.”

“And is that why you have put on your best new turban, Othman?”

“Don’t you make a mock of me, Asma,” said Othman; and then, with an upward turn of the whites of his eyes, “Oh, Asma!”

“Well, Othman!” said Asma, mocking him again.

“Is it two years or two centuries since your father gave you to Rachel, the Jewess?”

“Gracious saints! Do I look it?” cried Asma.

“No, but I feel it,” said Othman. “Asma, your father is sure to be here to-night, and I’ll ask him again. I’ll offer him something for your dowry, and



if he takes it we shall be married within a week."

"But if not—what then?"

"Then I'll poison myself; I'll drown myself; I'll burn myself, and everything I have—I will, by Allah!"

"And by Allah, the more fool you," said the girl. "Othman, you talk big of the Berbers; but if a Berber wanted a camel and offered to buy it, and the owner wouldn't sell it, though he couldn't want it for himself, and had lent it to somebody who didn't prize it, what do you think he would do?"

"Why, what?"

"Why, take it, you donkey, take it for nothing," said the girl.

Othman clapped his hands. "Asma! what a girl you are! You ought to be a man!"

"Heaven forbid I should be such a monkey!" said Asma.

There was another peal of laughter outside.



“Hark !” said Asma. “There’s sure to be a tumult to-night when the Mahdi comes down from the hills. Listen. Come back at moon-rise. I’ll be ready.”

Othman was buckling up his courage. “I’ll do it,” he said, “if your father says no——”

“Hush ! my father is coming.”

She had raised herself on tiptoe to look down a side street, and then was gone into the house like a gleam.

A moment afterwards a stalwart fellow came slouching into the market-place. The long gun of the Berbers was in his hand ; he had many daggers at his girdle ; his jellab trailed on the ground, and its lower edge was a fringe of tatters. His name was Otba. He was a Berber and the father of Asma.

“Here again, little master ?” he cried, seeing Othman under the balcony.

“Yes, Otba,” said Othman, with a tragic air, “here again, and again, and



always until you give up the jewel I have won from you."

"Catch your fish by the head, boy. What will you bait for her?" said Otba.

"I will give you—by Allah, I will give you a camel for your daughter," said Othman.

"Tut!" said Otba.

"I will give you—remember God, I say—I will give you a fat camel."

Otba laughed uproariously. "Away to your frills and ribbons, little master. Or is it candy and lolly-pops?"

"Yes, I know!" said Othman. "You despise me because I am a town-dweller, and earn my bread by the sweat of my brow. It's the way of all idle fellows, and thieves, and rascals, and vagabonds, the world over."

Otba lifted his gun threateningly. "Show us the breadth of your shoulders, little brother," he said.

Othman took the hint. "But you'll



repent it yet," he said. "I'll go away, but I'll come back—I'll come back."

As he turned the corner, Asma, unseen by her father, reappeared on the balcony, motioned to him significantly, and disappeared.

"Yes, you'll go away a donkey, and come back a jackass," said Otba, laughing.

Three men came walking through the market-place. One of them was Boobker, a Fez merchant, an elderly man, held in respect.

"Peace to you, Sidi Boobker," said the Berber.

"Peace! Peace! welcome to Fez! welcome!" said the old gentleman.

"Welcome to the strangers, Sidi," said Otba, indicating Boobker's companions.

"Who are they?"

"Merchants from Tadla," said Boobker.

"And your friend, Boobker?" said one of the two, indicating Otba.



"Otba, the Berber," said Boobker.

"Fresh from the mountain, Otba?" said the stranger. His name was Asad.

"Within the hour, Sidi," said the other.

"Did you see the Mahdi there?"

Otba sneered at the name. "Mohammed Abd er Rahman? I did. He will be down before long, and a fine welcome awaits him."

The old gentleman looked at the Berber. "That's not the voice of a friend, Otba. You do not love the Mahdi."

"Why should I?" said Otba.

"He is the brother of the poor," said Boobker.

Otba laughed derisively. "Call your enemy so when he gives scalding water to your thirsty camel."

"He is not a man to laugh at, brother," said Boobker. "Those who curse him to-day may bless him to-morrow."



Not for nothing was he called 'Mohammed the trusty.' "

"That was long ago, Sidi," said the Berber. "No longer 'Mohammed the trusty,' but 'Mohammed the madman.' He spends his days alone on the mountains, and his nights preaching to jeering clowns in the streets of Fez."

"He has his mission, Otba," said the merchant, "and more than the clowns of Fez will yet hear it."

"Mission!" laughed the Berber. "What is it? To sow discord where there was peace, to set brother against brother, father against son, wife against husband? Mission! Bah!"

There was another peal of laughter. Otba lifted his head, and went off in the direction of the sound.

The merchants drew closer together. "We must get the Mahdi away," whispered Boobker. "His life is not safe. Depend upon it, that man has been sent for." Then, looking across the market-



place, he added, "And here come his masters."

"Who are they?" said the other Tadla merchant. His name was El Arby.

"The new Basha of Fez," said Boobker.

"A wolf!" said Asad.

"And Jonas Maliki, his secretary," continued Boobker.

"An old fox," said Asad.

## II.

The Basha (the Governor) and his Jewish secretary came along, talking together as they walked.

"Thus and thus it is everywhere," said the Jew. "Yet I half suspect the madman has more friends than show themselves." At that moment his eye fell on the merchants. "Now old Boobker, there, his uncle, and those merchants from Tadla——"



“Sound them, Jonas ; I should love to know,” said the Basha.

Jonas saluted Boobker with vast respect. “Peace !”

“Peace !” answered Boobker.

“The market-place to-day has been like a fair waiting for its buffoon, hasn’t it ?” said the Jew. “Pity a time-honoured family like that of this Mahdi should be turned to ridicule by the zany doings of one of its members. We should drive the man out. Barbary could spare him. What do you say, Boobker ?”

The old merchant looked at the Jew sideways and answered, contemptuously, “I say ridicule is a sword without a hilt, wounding only the hand that wields it, and that Barbary could spare something much better than the Mahdi.”

“And what’s that ?” said Jonas, knowingly.

“The Jews that have infested it



these two hundred years," said the merchant.

In a moment Jonas had drawn a knife. "Insolent beggar!" he cried.

"Dog!" cried Boobker.

They were closing to fight when a new-comer stepped between them. He was a young man, tall, powerful, handsome, and richly dressed. It was Omar Benani. "Stop!" he cried. "Whatever Barbary could spare, one thing she wants, and that is a man who can make her men agree. Put up your knives before the Basha. If the Jew is the leper, the Arab is the plague."

Boobker laughed, and pointing to the big house he said, significantly, "Pity your Jewish mistress didn't hear that word, Omar Benani!"

With that and a parting look at the Jew, the old merchant went off, followed by his friends from Tadla.

"He was not always a saint, you say, this Mahdi?" said the Basha.



“Always!” cried Jonas, both hands up. “Like many another saint he has come to his saintship through sin. And this,” he added pointing to the big house, “is the very scene of his transfiguration.”

“This?” said the Basha.

“That,” said the Jew, “was the house of Isaac Laredo—one of my own people. He died before you came to Fez. He was killed. Rumour whispered that this Mahdi killed him.”

Omar had been standing by, and he said, impatiently, “That’s only an old gossip’s story, Jonas. Why repeat it to the Basha?”

“Gently, young man, gently,” said the Governor.

Omar turned aside and walked up and down restlessly, as if trying not to hear what was being said, yet unable to tear himself away.

“Isaac had a daughter,” said Jonas. “He was rich and she was beautiful.



So certain of your Moorish young bloods overcame their dread of doing ill in the next world in the hope of doing well in this one."

The Basha laughed. "So the young Muslims pay court to the rich Jewess?"

"Isaac would have none of them. He turned them all from his door. One night," said Jonas, solemnly, "he was found dead in his room, and the last man known to see him there was a certain partner of Isaac's own—Mohammed Abd er Rahman."

Omar stopped. "Who knows he was the last?" he said.

"Rachel herself admitted it."

"And what did my predecessor do?" asked the Basha.

"Nothing," said Jonas. "The man had fled into the mountains."

"And so out of remorse the murderer became a saint—is that it?" said the Basha.

"And turned his back on Rachel,"



said Jonas, and then they laughed together.

“Don’t heed the old-wife’s croak, lord Basha,” said Omar. “Isaac Laredo is dead. So much the better, whoever killed him.”

The laughter in the lane came again, more loudly than before.

“He’s coming!” said the Basha. “This madness must not spread. Watch him, listen to him closely, bring me word of what he says. Has Otba arrived?”

“He has, lord Basha,” said Jonas.

“Good! Murderer or no murderer, we must scour the vermin out of Fez. Then this upstart Mahdi, this champion of the poor, this liberator of women, this greater than Moses, this Messiah, this Star that is to rise when the sun of the Sultan has set——”

Jonas heard no more. The Basha’s voice was lost in the noise of a great concourse of people who were running



into the market-place. The Mahdi was coming from the mountains to preach in the streets.

### III.

He wore the sheepskin jellab of a mountaineer. Walking slowly, firmly, resolutely, he came on in the midst of an uproarious crowd that jeered at him at every step. He did not shrink; he showed no fear; the derision of the people did not touch him. Only his dark eyes flashed under his white turban, and the hand that held his long staff trembled visibly.

In front of him, and stepping backwards before him in mock obeisance, walked a pert little man in the scarlet soolham of an Eastern dandy, twanging a gimbri, the two-stringed tom-tom of the country. This was Jellalli, the poet. They had come to that part of the Sôk el Fôki which was immediately beneath the



big house with the balcony, when Jellalli stopped, waved his arm with a large gesture, and proceeded to address the people.

“Men of Fez,” cried the little poet, “behold the Taleb who knows what is going on in heaven!”

The people laughed.

“Behold the son of old Larby’s camel driver, who holds meetings with the angels in the hills!”

The people laughed louder.

“Behold your Mahdi! Speak, O prophet! why are you silent?”

The Mahdi drew himself up to his full height and answered, “Balaam himself was silent when his ass began to speak.”

“The prophet is ungrateful,” said the little poet. “Look at the crowds I have brought out to greet you! Have I not done well?”

“You have indeed done well,” said the Mahdi. “You have been less than a week in this city, Jellalli, but you have



lost no time. You have made yourself the reputation of the greatest liar ever known here—and that's no little thing in Fez."

The people laughed again.

"So a prophet is a bird that fouls its own nest," said Jellalli. And then, as by a sudden thought, "But if you are a prophet, work us a miracle."

"God no longer works miracles by his prophets," said the Mahdi.

"Aha! and why not?" said the poet.

"Because," said the Mahdi, "the devil has begun to do so by his fools."

The laughter of the people continued, and the Mahdi faced them fearlessly. "Go on!" he cried. "I am not the first prophet who has been laughed to scorn. But all that you do this day in mockery you will one day do in earnest."

"So," said Jellalli, with a knowing look on the people about, "we are to bow the back to you as to a king sent down from heaven?"



“Yes, by Allah!” said the Mahdi, with heat and dignity.

There was great laughter. The little poet began to twang his gimbri again, and to sing a song of mock tribute:

“On a day that’s to come  
We’ll all have to sing  
The praise and the pluck  
Of Mohammed the king!”

The Mahdi listened unmoved, but when Jellalli had finished he answered bitterly:

“On a day that’s to come  
We’ll see in the mire  
The tongue and the trunk  
Of Jellalli, the liar!”

The laughter was now turned against the poet, and he was hustled out of the crowd.

Otba, the Berber, crushed through. “And what’s your new doctrine, Mahdi?” he asked.

“To bend the knee to one God and serve no false gods,” said the Mahdi.



“What false gods do we serve? We say our prayers to Allah, don’t we?”

“That’s all you do for Him,” said the Mahdi. “But what do you worship? Dollars!”

Otba pretended to laugh. “And women!” he said. “Allow that at least we worship women.”

“Then that’s why you keep them penned up in your harems,” said the Mahdi, “buying them like your justice, selling them like your honour, trading with their beauty as you would trade with Paradise.”

There was a murmur of assent, and Jonas, the Jew, who had been standing on the skirts of the crowd, shouted over the people’s heads, “Don’t listen to that pestilent babbler. We thought him a madman, a dreamer, a man enchanted. We were wrong. He is a revolutionary, bent on the ruin of our religion and our laws. Don’t you see his purpose? It is to pluck down the Basha and the



Sultan, and turn the East into the West."

The shaft told; the murmurs of assent became murmurs of anger.

"My people," said the Mahdi, in tones of appeal, "do not hear them. There is nothing laid upon me but to deliver a plain message. I come to recall the Islam of Mohammed. If that plucks down the great, they are grinding your faces; if it lifts up the poor, they are your brethren; if it liberates women, they are your sisters. Hear me! I swear to you by the breath of dawn, by the stars that hide, by the darkening night, that a day is coming when this land shall be rent asunder, when Barbary shall quake——"

He did not finish. His speech had created a great division. Boobker and the two merchants from Tadla returned to the market-place. They tried in vain to pacify the people. Hands were lifted against the Mahdi, and there were cries



of "Down with him!" "Stone him!"  
"Away with him!"

The door of the big house opened again, and a woman appeared on the balcony. In another moment she had run down the steps, and was crushing her way through the crowd to the Mahdi's side, lifting her hand in front of her, and crying, "Stop! stop!" It was Rachel, the Jewess. The people made way for her and fell back. There was a moment of silence.

"Are you men?" she cried. "Is this Fez! Is there no chivalry in Barbary? One defenceless man among so many! Shame on you!" Then, to the Mahdi, "Come with me! Take refuge in my house."

The Mahdi took the hand that was held out to him. "Gentle lady," he said, "we are in the hand of God, and He has sent His angel to protect His servant."

The lady led the Mahdi to the steps.



No one attempted to prevent; no one spoke. Going through the crowd they passed young Omar, and Rachel whispered, "Come to me to-night."

"To-night," said Omar, with a bow.

"Remember!" said Rachel.

In a moment the Madhi and the Jewess were gone into the house. Boobker and the two merchants from Tadla followed them. The darkness was gathering, and the crowd dispersed.

#### IV.

A few minutes later only Omar, Jonas, and Otba were left in the open square.

"What does this mean? Does she love the man still?" said Jonas.

"Don't ask me," said Omar.

"Omar," said Jonas, in an undertone, "this man must die, and you must kill him."

"God forbid!" exclaimed Omar.

"You alone have entrance to the



house. You are to come here to-night. I know it—I heard you,” said Jonas.

“But what has he done?” said Omar.

“Done?” said Jonas. “Nothing that the Basha can lay hold of, and therefore we must work his will without him. Let this madman go on for a year, and there will not be a Basha left in Barbary.”

“Even so, what of that?” said Omar.

Otba laughed bitterly. “Are you afraid of a blood feud?” he said. “Well, let the saints decide. We’ll draw lots. Here!”

He took off his satchel, his money-bag, and handed it to the Jew. “I’ll mark one moozoonah,” he said. He took a copper coin out of the bag, marked it with the point of his knife, and cast it back. “It is done. Now I draw.” With that he dipped his hand into the bag.

“And I,” said Jonas, and he dipped his hand also. “Your turn, Omar.”



But Omar hesitated. "What has the man done to *me*? Nothing," he faltered.

"So?" said Jonas, insinuatingly. "Omar, what do the Christians say? 'The fire is soon rekindled when the hearth is hot.'"

Saying this he laughed knowingly, and pointed to where Rachel and the Mahdi had gone into the house together. The stab went home.

"Come!" said Omar, and he dipped into the bag.

Jonas and Otba glanced at their coins and smiled; but Omar, without looking, offered his coin to Jonas. They started at the sight of it.

"I knew it," said Omar, solemnly. "The deed is written on my forehead. I *must* have come to it."

The moon had risen by this time, and Othman, with a light heart and a light step, was coming to his assignation with Asma, when he saw the three men under



the walls of Rachel's house and he stepped back.

"Go to him at midnight," said Jonas. "The merchants from Tadla are with him now. When they are gone let it be done. At the sound of the Mooddin's voice strike home. We will be near and others with us. When he is down you will throw the door open to us, and we will enter at your watchword. Then each will fling a weapon into his body. That will be for your safety, so that if a blood-feud should come of this night's work, it will be the family of one against the families of all."

Omar was in a stupor. "And the watchword?" he asked.

"Allah-u-Kabar! God is great!" said Jonas.

Omar was moving towards the steps of the house. "At the voice of the Mooddin, you say?"

"At the voice of the Mooddin," said Jonas. "Remember—God is great."



"God is great," repeated Omar.

Then he ascended the steps and disappeared over the balcony like a man walking under a spell. Jonas and Otba stood a moment in the empty market-place watching him.

"I half mistrust him," said Jonas. "He's brave to excess, and that's cowardice."

Then they went off together.

Othman came panting from the ambush of a door and called up at the balcony in a voice of fear, "Asma! Asma! Asma!"

The girl appeared in the moonlight, hooded for their flight. "Are you ready, Othman?" she whispered down.

"Yes—no—we must wait," said Othman, in a bewildered way.

"What's amiss? Speak," said Asma.

"Hush! There's to be murder in this house to-night. Omar is to kill the Mahdi."



"Omar! He's with my mistress now. I'll tell her."

"On your life—no!" said Othman. "But as soon as he is alone, tell the Mahdi. Quick, girl, quick!"

Asma went back into the house and Othman hurried away.

V.

Rachel was waiting in the patio of her house. She was now a true daughter of her people—a woman capable of great love, great hatred, great devotion, and great revenge.

The patio was open to the sky; the night was dark, but the stars were shining. The moon was not yet risen above the walls. A warm red glow came from the window of a room wherein a lamp was burning.

Omar approached with slow steps, and Rachel received him with a soft cry of joy. There were some whispered words,



and then Omar said uneasily, "But why did you bring him here?"

"Hush!" said Rachel. "Are you vexed that what I have asked you to do will be so much the easier done?"

"In another moment the people would have done it for you, without deceit and without treachery. But for you they must have stoned him to death."

Rachel laughed. "So *he* thinks, but he is wrong," she said. "His shrewd tongue had already divided them, and then these merchants from Tadla——"

"At least they would have driven him out of Fez to-night," said Omar.

"And he would have returned to it in the morning," said Rachel. "No, there was but one way, Omar, call it by what bad name you will."

"My love, my dearest! What has he done to deserve it? Mercy beseems a woman, Rachel, if vengeance befits a man."

Rachel threw back her head. "And



so this madman——” she began, in a low, deep, passionate voice.

“If he is mad, it is enough to pity him,” said Omar.

“The mad are sometimes dangerous,” began Rachel again.

“What danger is there in *him*? If only he was a tyrant, a despot, a Basha! But he is an outcast, a pariah, all but a beggar, and to lay hands on him is to insult calamity itself. I cannot do it. There is nothing to prompt me, nothing to justify me, nothing——” He looked at her significantly——“nothing save one thing——”

Rachel turned aside. “Very well. Good night!” she said, coldly.

“Tell me what he has done, and I will do it,” said Omar, impulsively.

“He has injured me, deeply, very deeply, past mercy and past forgiveness,” said Rachel.

“And you have chosen me to avenge you?”



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"I have chosen you to avenge me."

"For what?" said Omar.

Rachel did not answer immediately. "That," she said at length, "is my secret."

Omar began to stammer, "I know that he——"

"Make no conjecture," said Rachel.

"Is it," said Omar, solemnly, "is it that——"

"Guess no more," said Rachel.

"If," said Omar, still more solemnly, "if it is——"

Rachel turned back to him and whispered in his ear, in a low voice like a caress, "Come to me when it is done and I will tell you everything." Then putting her arms about his neck, "Dearest," she said, "chance has delivered him into our hands; so put no more arguments to me, put them to Fate."

Omar started at the word. "Yes, Fate has brought me here," he said.



“Have you not come by my appointment?”

“We drew lots—I, Jonas the Jew, and Otba.”

“And the lot fell to you?”

“The lot fell to me.”

There was silence for a moment, and then Rachel laughed and said, “This is great news. Who can escape his destiny?”

“Who, indeed?”

“Now you can have no fear. Heaven has willed it.”

“It must be so. If there is any guilt the guilt is not mine,” said Omar.

“Who dare say it is?” said Rachel.

Omar looked in at the window of the room where the lamp was burning. His breath was coming fast.

“What is he doing?” he asked.

“The Tadla merchants are with him. When he is alone I will take you to him. Then it will be man to man.”



“Ay, man to man,” said Omar, in a hushed whisper.

“And when all is over everybody will say, ‘The rabble that would have stoned him to death——’”

“Yes, yes,” said Omar, eagerly. “The rabble—the rabble—no other man suspected.”

“‘The rabble,’” continued Rachel, “‘that would have stoned him to death but for the daughter of Isaac Laredo, have broken into her house and killed him.’”

Omar started uneasily at the name. “Rachel,” he said, “sometimes I think that you and I should not be to each other what we are.”

The woman put her arms about his neck and laughed a soft laugh. “My dearest, when is that?”

“When I am alone—in the night—when I cannot sleep.”

There was another moment of heavy silence. The woman’s arms dropped from his neck.



"Come, come," said Rachel, cheerfully, "chase away these heavy looks. What are differences of faith to those who love? When this turbulent babbler is silenced for ever you shall have your reward."

"My darling!" said Omar. Then, in a chill voice, "Where is he?"

"In my father's room—the room where my father died," said Rachel, in a low tone.

Omar drew back suddenly. "There? No—not there!" he stammered.

"Ah, *he* seems to fear no ghosts," said Rachel, bitterly.

Omar embraced her passionately. "I'll do it," he said. "My hope! My stay! My love! For your sake it shall be done!"

He broke from her arms with a passionate kiss and stepped into the house. It was now late, and the moon was dipping down into the court.



## VI.

The Mahdi was in the lamp-lit room opening on to the patio. Boobker and the merchants from Tadla were with him.

“Mahdi,” said Asad, “Fez turns its back on you—come with us to Tadla.”

“Patience,” said the Mahdi. “Fez is my mother, I am her son, and she shall yet receive me.”

“‘Stretch your leg according to your shawl’—it’s a good saw,” said Boobker. “You cannot stay here, Mahdi. Your life is not worth a pin’s purchase.”

“Tadla is waiting for the truth. Come and deliver it,” said Asad.

The Mahdi considered for a moment. Then he said, “Everything is ordained. It is written that I should go with you. When do you leave Fez?”

“Within the hour,” said Asad.

“I will follow you to-morrow. Mahdi or prophet, I am a man with a man’s af-



fections, and Fez holds all that are dear to me—my sister, and her son.”

“We will wait,” said Asad.

“God requite you abundantly. The present is patience, but the future breathes of revenge. I am driven away as a beggar, but I will return as a conqueror. Good night !”

“Good night ! God bless your morning !” said the merchants, and they left him.

As well as the window to the patio there was an open doorway to the market-place. The Mahdi stepped up to this doorway and looked out on the housetops, sleeping under the white light of the moon. The city was quiet now ; the wing of night lay softly over it.

“Take your last look, Mohammed Abd er Rahman !” he thought. “Farewell, my mother, farewell ! To-morrow you will have the earth for your resting-place, and the heavens for your tent.”



The Mahdi was turning away when Rachel drew the curtains of the door from the patio and softly entered the room.

"The night is far gone," she said. "You must be very tired."

"I will lie down and sleep," said the Mahdi.

"Yes, yes, a long, long sleep," said Rachel.

"The sleep would have been longer and the bed harder but for you, Rachel," said the Mahdi.

"Say no more about that, Mahdi," she answered.

Rachel was moved with an awe which she dare not betray; she was seeing the room at that moment as it had been on the night when she found her father lying there dead. She drew up a mattress and thought, "That is the very spot." Then she said aloud, "Come, lie here."

The Mahdi lay down. "You saved



my life, Rachel ; God will requite you," he said.

"He does not remember," thought Rachel. Then, aloud as before, "I will turn the stove, Mahdi. My father always liked it so." She turned the brass stove so that the soft red glow might fall on the Mahdi's swarthy face.

"Ah, yes, your poor father !" said the Mahdi. "God rest him !"

"Amen ! Amen !" said Rachel. "He does not care," she thought. A harp stood in a corner of the room. "Shall I sing you to sleep ?" she said, softly. "My father always loved it."

The Mahdi looked at her and smiled wearily. "You are still anxious about me, Rachel. But there is nothing to fear now. Go to your rest. Good night !"

"I shall never sleep until you are sleeping," said Rachel.

"The world and all things in it are good, but the goodliest thing in the



world is a good woman," said the Mahdi.

"Now hush! hush!" said Rachel. She played softly and sang in a low tone that was like a lullaby.

The heart of the Mahdi was touched. "Ah, Rachel," said he, "but for the freaks of fate, what joy of life there might have been for you and me?"

Rachel stopped. "How can I sing, Mahdi, if you talk so?" she said.

"How beautiful you are, Rachel; how very beautiful!"

"Not a word more now—not one little word. Hush! Hush!"

She played again, but without singing. After a while she rose and approached the mattress. The Mahdi was asleep. She thought, "Now is the time. Yet my heart misgives me. His words were like poisoned arrows. 'You saved my life; God will requite you.' 'How beautiful you are, how very beautiful!' 'But for the freaks of fate what joy of



life there might have been for you and me!’ Must it be? Must it be? Yet he was cruel then, and now he is callous. Look, he can sleep on the very spot. Ugh! Courage! courage!” She stepped aside. “It must be done,” she thought. “Surely heaven directed my choice of Omar. He loves me, and the lot fell to him. He will do it—he will do it.”

Taking up the lamp, she went noiselessly out of the room. No light remained except that of the stove falling on the Mahdi, and some rays of moonlight which came through the window to the patio.

## VII.

In the silence Omar entered nervously. He looked around like a man in terror. “The very room,” he thought. “Was there no place on earth but this? Ghosts! It is full of them. That awful night—the desk—the door—and ”—



turning towards the mattress—"the very spot."

He returned to the door and pushed it open as if about to fly. Then with a glow of resolution he closed the door again. "Pshaw! That's dead and done with."

Returning to the mattress, he bent over the Mahdi. "Asleep!" he thought. "Kill a man in sleep! You can't do that, Omar. . . I'll go back." He stepped back, and then stopped. "Asleep—perhaps dreaming!"

Stricken by this thought, he stepped aside. "I dare not. God knows I dare not do it," he told himself.

He went back to the door again, and stood with one hand on the lintel. "But Rachel!" he thought. "She is waiting. Rachel, my love, my life! Oh, Oh!"

It was midnight. There was not a sound in the air. Suddenly the chant of the Mooddin came from the



mosque. "Allah - u - Kabar"—God is great.

"The Mooddin ! It must be done. At least I can awaken him," thought Omar.

He returned to the mattress, sword in hand, and cried in a loud voice, "Mahdi ! Mahdi ! awake ! Your time has come."

The Mahdi awoke and opened his eyes, but he did not rise. "Omar !" he said, calmly.

"Rise !" cried Omar. "Who have you to save you now ? There are but two of us here," and he brandished the naked sword.

"You are wrong, Omar Benani," said the Mahdi, calmly ; "there is a third—there is God !"

Omar was cowed at the word ; he let fall his sword in his terror, and at the next moment the Mahdi had leapt to his feet and snatched it up.

"Now, Omar, who is there to save *you* ?" he cried.



Omar dropped to his knees. "None, none!" he answered.

The Mahdi handed the sword back to Omar, saying, "Then learn mercy from me."

"Mahdi! Master! Lord! I am your slave for ever," cried Omar.

There was a sound of hurrying feet: the door from the patio opened, and Asma entered in great agitation.

"My lord, Omar is coming——" she began, and then, seeing Omar on his knees, she stopped in dismay.

Omar leapt to his feet. "God of grace, forgive me! Only half your danger is past," he said.

"What is the rest?" said the Mahdi.

"Jonas, the Jew, my father, and many more are outside the house," cried Asma.

"It is true," said Omar. "At my watchword they were to enter and plunge their knives into your body."

The Mahdi stepped calmly to the doorway overlooking the market place.



"I see them," he said. "They are in the Sôk el Fôki."

Omar, with his sword in hand, stepped to the doorway. "Let them come," he said, "and God help him that comes the first."

The Mahdi was still looking out. "They are ten to two," he said.

"No matter!" said Omar.

"Impossible!" said the Mahdi.

"Escape, my lord, escape!" cried Asma.

"Be calm, my daughter, be calm," said the Mahdi. "Do not alarm your mistress. She will be asleep." Then in another voice, "Is there no other way out of this house?"

"None but to the market-place," said the girl.

"Then I must go through that," said the Mahdi. He turned to Omar. "Brother, dare you take my place on that mattress until I have passed out of this door?"



“Try me,” said Omar.

“Give me your soolham,” said the Mahdi.

Omar took off the cloak and the Mahdi put it on.

“What is your watchword?”

“‘God is great.’”

The Mahdi turned to the girl. “Conceal yourself, child, and God bless you. Now, silence!”

Asma slid out. Omar crept to the mattress and prepared to lie down. At that moment the faces of men were seen in the moonlight through the arch of the doorway.

“They are here,” said the Mahdi, in an undertone. “Are you ready, Omar?”

“Ready!” said Omar. He was now lying on the mattress.

The Mahdi stepped to the door. The faces met him. “God is great,” he cried.

“God is great,” answered voices from without.



The Mahdi passed through. At the next moment three men rushed into the room, crying, "Death to the Mahdi!"

Omar rose from the mattress, and at sight of his face the men fell back in dismay.

"Omar?" they cried.

At the same moment Rachel returned to the room with the lamp in her hand.

"Omar!" she exclaimed.

"Fool!" cried Otba.

"Traitor!" cried Jonas.

The Mahdi had escaped.



## THIRD PART.

### I.

It was early morning in Tadla. The city was not yet awake; the gate was still closed, and the porter was asleep. Two camels and two camel drivers lay on the ground at the foot of the stone daïs which stood by the city wall. A third man had also been sleeping there. He arose. It was Otba, the Berber. The sun was coming up.

"Time to be stirring, brothers," said Otba.

"So soon?" said one of the camel drivers. His name was Larby. He was a young man, impulsive and talkative. "I was dreaming I was the prophet's eunuch, and had forty slaves and twenty wives."

The other camel driver aroused him-



self. He was an old man, solemn and taciturn.

“What says the poet? ‘Sleep makes us all Bashas!’”

“Seems less than an hour since we came in from Fez,” said Larby, “and now, before we have time to turn——”

“To turn!” cried the older man. “Leave you to sleep, and you’ll turn and turn till midday.”

“Well, one good turn deserves another,” said Larby. Then, facing towards Otba, “Ah, and here is the stranger.”

The old man grunted. “I tell you again, he is no Mahdist,” he said. “And we’ll be punished for bringing him into the city. Here, stranger, take back your money, and go while you are safe.”

“Keep it. I’m in Tadla now,” said Otba, with a laugh.

“That’s just why your life is in danger, and our skins as well,” said the older camel driver.



"I'll risk it," said Otba.

"So will I," said Larby. "What does the Koran say, 'If the infidel seek refuge with you, give it him that he may hear the word of God.'"

"Good," said Otba; "but I am no infidel. Only I've not been in Tadla since the Mahdi settled there."

Larby made a long whistle. "Not in Tadla since a year ago! Then you'll see some changes."

"Things do seem altered," said Otba.

"Altered," cried Larby, rapturously. "Say transfigured. Where's the old Kasbah? Gone. Where's the old prison that was a dungeon on a dunghill? Gone. Where's the harem of the Basha? Gone. Where's the Basha himself, who used to grind the faces of the poor? Gone. Where's the Kadi who used to sell his justice to the rich? Gone—all gone! Instead of these look and see: the mosque, the courts of law, the barracks, the women in the streets with



uncovered faces, the Moslem and the Nazarene, the Jew and the Christian, all equal and all free."

Otba curled his lip contemptuously. "Wonderful!" he said, in a tone of mockery. "And the Mahdi himself, is he changed also?"

"The apostle of God—God favour and preserve him!—is changed only in condition; in character he is the same. Then he was a hunted wolf—now he is a conquering lion."

"And Rachel, the Jewess, what of her?"

"No Jewess now, brother. When she was married to the Mahdi she became a true believer."

"Humph! No Jew ever changes his faith," said Otba. "So she is the Mahdi's wife?"

Larby's impulsive tongue hesitated. "His wife—hum! ha!—well—we are the Mahdi's servants."

"Larby," said the old man, severely,



“you exceed in talk. Ask pardon of God.”

“So that’s how it is,” thought Otba. “And her young maid, Asma, the Berber, is she one of the Mahdi’s concubines?”

The old man’s face clouded. “Stranger, listen,” he said. “Believer or infidel, remember the saw that says ‘I’m the slave of what I speak, and the lord of what I think.’”

At that moment a deep, low murmur as of many voices came from a Mosque whose minarets overlooked the city gate.

“Good,” said Otba, cheerfully. “But why be afraid of me?” He paused to listen. “What’s that noise?” he asked.

“Prayer in the Mosque,” said Larby.

A troop of people came down the street behind the Mosque. Among them were the blind, the lame, and the infirm.

“And who are these people?” said Otba.



"Pensioners and petitioners of the Mahdi," said Larby. "He will come out presently."

"Hush, he is coming now," said the older camel driver.

The camel drivers roused their camels and drove them aside. Otba stepped back. Voices came from within the Mosque. "Praise be to God! Praise be to God and His prophet!"

## II.

A moment later the Mahdi came out of the Mosque, attended by Boobker and Asad, and made his way to the daïs. He was clothed in white. The people pressed round him, kneeling and supplicating. He was pushing his way through when he saw the camel drivers, and stopped.

"Larby," he said, "when did you return?"

"Late last night, my lord," said Larby.



"And Omar?" asked the Mahdi eagerly.

"We left him in Fez," said Larby. "He sent us forward with the baggage. He is following, and will be here to-day."

The Mahdi drew a deep breath. "God grant he bring good tidings," he said. Then, in an easier voice: "Boobker, if you have any petitioners to-day I will give them audience now." And with that he took his seat on the daïs.

The gate of the city was the Court House of Tadla.

Boobker brought up a man and a woman. "This woman," he said, "being divorced from this man, for infidelity with his brother, claims back her dowry, but the man says he has paid her already."

"What did you pay her?" said the Mahdi to the man.

"A hundred silver dollars," the man answered.



"It's false, my lord; he paid me nothing!" cried the woman.

"One of you must be lying—which is it?" said the Mahdi.

"It's he, my lord," said the woman.

The man did not speak for a moment; then he said, "A good wife is a crown on the head of a king, Mahdi, but a wicked wife is a burden on the back of an old man. She had beggared me before I divorced her, and dishonoured me in the face of all believers."

"What have you got left?" the Mahdi asked.

"Only one camel, not worth the hundred dollars she demands over again," said the man.

"You must give it up to her," said the Mahdi.

"God bless you, my lord," cried the woman, with great joy, "and may the wife of your heart be blessed. You are true to all women, and deserve that all women should be true to you."



The man looked on the ground. "I'm a ruined man," he faltered.

The Mahdi turned to the woman. "He has nothing now. Will you not give him something?"

"I don't mind," she said, largely. "Here's a silver dollar for him."

"Hand it to me first," said the Mahdi. He looked at it critically. "What," he cried, "base metal? You carry false money? Do you know the penalty?"

The woman was thrown off her guard. "Base? False? Penalty?" she exclaimed. "How should I know it was false? He gave it me, and if any one is to be imprisoned for it, imprison him." Then she lost herself. "Oh, my lord Mahdi," she cried, "it is no use to deceive you. My husband did pay me the hundred dollars, but he paid me in bad money, and that false dollar is one of them. So it comes to what I said at the first, and I'm as innocent as the babe unborn."



"Take her away," said the Mahdi. "The silver is as good as ever was coined."

The woman was being hustled out when the gate of the city opened and Omar came in covered with dust, and threw himself at the feet of the daïs.

"Omar!" cried the Mahdi, rising to his feet.

"Peace be on you, Mahdi," said Omar.

"And on you also," said the Mahdi. "What news from Fez? What welcome from your embassy?"

Omar rose and drew himself up. "What welcome?" he said. "Insults, Mahdi; taunts, jeers, curses."

"Curses, Omar?"

"Ay, curses, and all but blows."

"Blows? Speak, Omar, speak."

"They received me in the Kasbah," said Omar, "the Bashi, the Kadi, the Kaleefa, everybody. 'The Mahdi has conquered Morocco for the Moors,' I said. 'The Sultan is dead, his ministers



are banished, his prisons broken open, his harems dispersed; man in Barbary is free, and woman is a slave no longer. The Mahdist empire is founded. The nations of the world acknowledge it. Only Fez remains what she was—a disgrace to humanity, an outrage on Islam, and the Mahdi calls on her to submit.”

“Right and true,” said the Mahdi. “What answer did they make?”

“What answer? They gave me ‘Liar!’ for my answer. ‘Traitor!’ ‘Coward!’ ‘Liar I am not,’ I said, ‘traitor I never was, and let him who called me coward step out and prove it.’”

“Bravely spoken. What then?”

“Then they said, ‘And pray what will this Mahdi do if Fez should refuse?’ ‘March out on her,’ I cried; ‘fight her, destroy her, burn her! Which is it to be—peace or war? Give me your answer for the prophet of God.’”

“What did they say to that?”



““We know of no prophet of God, save one,’ they said. ‘That’s strange,’ I cried, ‘for your master the devil knows him but too well.’ ‘As for this second Mohammed,’ said they, ‘tell him that we have sentenced him to death.’ ‘So,’ said I, ‘has the second Mohammed sentenced you.’ At that they lifted stones, and would have stoned me. The white flag was useless. There was nothing left but to escape, and I leapt to my horse and fled. Thus I am home from Fez, my lord, bringing nothing back of my mission but menace and mockeries.”

The Mahdi was moved. “Yes, Omar,” he said, proudly, “you bring back that which your master prizes above honours and obeisance—yourself, the lion and sword of Islam. What though you were driven out of Fez? Even so was the Mahdi before you. Fez shall fall—her day of decision is past. If the insults of the Bashas ring in your ears, you shall yet wipe them out on their faces.



Welcome, thrice welcome! More welcome to-day than when you came to me covered in the glory of your blood from battle."

Omar half-turned aside. "I am weary after my journey, Mahdi," he said.

"You shall go into my house and rest."

Omar made a movement of dissent.

"Yes; my wife herself shall see to you. Yet wait!" he said, and rose to his feet. "Men of Tadla, listen," he cried, raising his voice, so that the people might hear. "Here I appoint Omar, my friend and brother, the hero of Islam, the insulted of Fez, to be the first Calife of your leader, his heir and successor, to stand at the head of all believers when God shall need your Mahdi no more."

There was a shout of assent from the crowd, but Omar shook his head. "I am not fit to walk in your shadow, my lord," he said. "Your words crush me more than your honours lift me up. You



do not know me—let me go, I am faint and athirst.”

“Lead him into my house.”

Boobker stepped out. He had been watching Omar with no friendly eyes. “Nay, but into mine, Mahdi; it is nearest,” he said.

“Into mine, I say,” said the Mahdi, “for Rachel herself shall serve him.”

Omar was led away, and the Mahdi, stepping down from the daïs, lifted his clenched hand towards the country beyond the gate. “Oh, Fez, Fez,” he cried, “you are my mother, yet I feel towards you as a father who must chasten his son, though his bowels yearn over him to spare him !”

Asad, the merchant, was standing near. “You will leave us at Tadla,” he said.

“God has willed it,” said the Mahdi. “Fez is the heart of Barbary. Not till Fez has fallen will Barbary be free. She is the stronghold of the old order, and we must go out against her. Make ready.



Bring your tributes to the Mosque to-night—your gold, your silver, your jewels, your adornments. Make ready, make ready; we must take her by surprise.”

He was going back to his house followed by his people, when Otba stepped in front of him. The Mahdi stopped.

“Otba, the Berber!” he said with astonishment.

“Otba, the friend of the Basha,” said Boobker, in his ear.

The Mahdi hesitated a moment, and then cried, “Take him.”

Two men laid hands on Otba.

“Have no fear, Mahdi,” said the Berber, “I’m not here to play the spy for Fez. My own business is enough for me.”

“What is it?” said the Mahdi.

“My daughter—where is she? By what knavery have you kept her from her father for a year? Where is she? What is she?”



“Larby, bring her here,” said the Mahdi.

Larby went off hurriedly.

The Mahdi looked steadfastly at the Berber for a moment. Then he said, “Otba, a year ago you pursued me to slay me. Listen! In your mother’s tent there was a boy, a stranger, a son of Fez. His own mother was dead. He was a weakling; he was sent up into the mountains and your good mother nursed him. But she had a son of her own, a babe, and it was the light of her life. One day there was war in the bashalic; your mother fled to the help of her husband, and fell beside him. She had left her child asleep in the tent, and a boar came down from the hills. The child’s arm was in its bloody jaws, and only the boy was there to fight it. But he slew it, though its claws tore the flesh from his forehead, and the life of the babe was saved. Otba, you were that babe, and I was



that boy. Look at your arm above the elbow—your right arm. Does no mark remain ? ”

Otba drew up his sleeve, and showed a red scar on his arm. At the same moment the Mahdi lifted his hair and showed a scar on his forehead. “And now look here ! ”

There was silence for a moment. Then Otba said, in a breaking voice, “Often as I have seen the scar, never before have I known the cause of it.”

Larby came back leading Asma. She looked perplexed and ashamed with so many eyes upon her.

“Asma,” said the Mahdi, “see, your father has come to fetch you. He thinks I have kept you thus long in Tadla by force of a false alliance. No words would efface that evil thought ; but you are free to follow him. So go, and God go with you both.”

“But, master——” said Asma, with a look of dismay.



"I'll go alone," said Otba.

"Father——" cried Asma.

"Stay where you are, child; I've been in the wrong."

"Otba," said the Mahdi, "a while ago you told me not to fear you. I do not fear you, I trust you. I could imprison you. I could put you to death. You have heard my secret, that I mean to march back on Fez. Now take your fleetest horse; go by your steepest passes. Farewell!"

Otba dropped to his knees. "Mahdi, forgive me," he cried; "I am your slave for ever."

The people raised a shout, "Praise be to God!"

Otba rose to his feet with an altered face. "I will not betray you," he said, "but I will lead you into Fez. Give me five hundred men, clad like Berbers, and I will fly towards the city crying, 'The Mahdi is pursuing us! Let us in!' Then you shall come after us with five thou-



sand men and encamp outside the walls, and the same night, at midnight, we shall throw open the gates to you, and you shall enter and possess the city."

"It shall be done," cried the Mahdi. "Meet me at the mosque to-night."

"To-night! To-night!" shouted the people. Then the Mahdi went home surrounded by Boobker, Asad, and others of his followers.

### III.

The Mahdi's house looked on to the mosque. Through an open colonnade the minarets could be seen. Between these ran a narrow lane. It was still early morning, and somewhere below a camel-driver was singing a song of the desert—

Camel driver, camel driver,  
Now whither away?  
'Tis the eye of the morning,  
The dawn of the day.



Rachel, now wife of the Mahdi, was sitting at work on a mattress covered by a rug.

“Hark!” she thought. “Omar’s camel-drivers! Then he must be back from Fez.”

Camel driver, camel driver,  
Nay, why roll your tent?  
My spirit is wounded,  
My heart it is rent.

A child’s voice came up from the lane.  
“Rachel! Rachel!”

Rachel stepped to the colonnade and waved her handkerchief. “Hosein! little Hosein! Come up, come up,” she called. “The dear little man!” “The bright, brave little heart—a man’s soul in a baby body! *He* is not watching me, and spying on me, and dogging me—like his mother Fatima, like my own maid Asma, like Boobker, like everybody except the Mahdi—everybody, everybody, except him who has most cause.”

There was the patter of little feet out-



side, and at the next moment a boy of seven, dressed in the little blue jellab of the country, burst into the room, and flew into Rachel's arms.

"Hosein!" she said, on her knees beside the boy. "What a sunny little man it is! A hop, skip and a jump of sunlight in a dark place! What cheeks, what roses!"

But the boy was bursting with great news. "Rachel——" he began.

"But — but — but," said Rachel, "you're surely not too much of a man to kiss me? You are? Come then. No?"—pretending modesty. "Nay, then, I must put up my veil when *men* come to see me."

"Listen," said Hosein, kissing Rachel and then blurting out his news; "only think — we're to go back to Fez!"

"Fez!" said Rachel, rising suddenly. She was serious now.

"There's to be a pilgrimage," said the



boy. "The Mahdi said so at the gate this morning."

"What did he say?" said Rachel. "Tell me, tell me!"

"He said that if Omar brought bad news——"

"And has he?"

"Yes, so we are all to go," said Hosein, clapping his hands. "Mother, and you, and Asma, and everybody. You and mother will be in litters. I am to be a soldier and ride with Omar." He strutted about the room.

"What great, great news!" said Rachel; "and what a soldier you'll be when you come back?"

"Yes; you'll have to put up your veil then, will you not?" said Hosein. "Just as you do for Omar, eh?"

Rachel caught her breath at that name, but recovering herself she said, "Ah! you'll not have much time for us poor women after that."

"Soldiers never have—look at Omar,"



said the little man. Then he went on with the order of march. "Omar will be in front, and I'll be behind him." He began to act it. "See, I'll show you. That's Fez,"—fixing a pillow in position on the floor. "I'm Omar, and you are Hosein. This is my sword"—catching up a fan and shouldering it—"and that's yours"—giving her another fan. "Now, one, two, three——"

The small recruit began to march about the room, and Rachel followed him, laughing and keeping time to his tiny footsteps. The camel driver was still singing somewhere below, and the mimic march was proceeding, when Omar stepped in by the colonnade. Rachel saw him, and said, "Run, Hosein, run, or your mother will be seeking you. Run, dearest, run," and so hustled the boy out.



## IV.

“Rachel!” said Omar.

“Then you are back,” said Rachel.

He did not look at her; she did not look at him. Their voices were cold, their manner was formal. “He sent me here himself; I was weary after my journey. ‘Go into my house and rest,’ he said; and then he named your name.”

“Mine?”

“Ah! his noble soul is above all suspicion. He takes us for what we should be—that made me ashamed of what we are.”

Rachel’s voice began to soften. “What evil have we done?” she said. “Do you wish to banish even memory?”

“It is our duty,” said Omar. “He is the Mahdi—you are his wife.”

“And why?” said Rachel. “Why am I the wife of the Mahdi? Because



you deserted me in Fez to follow him in Tadla."

"I came to know him as a prophet of God," said Omar. "You were prompting me to kill him; I had to make my choice."

Rachel's lip curled perceptibly. "And you chose the Mahdi," she said.

"I chose the Mahdi," repeated Omar.

"What was the Mahdi to you? Nothing. What was I?"

"You were everything to me, Rachel," said Omar; "the light of my eyes, the star of my night, the breath of my dawn. I loved you; I would have laid down my life for you——"

Rachel laughed a little. "And yet——" she began.

"And yet I fled from you," said Omar.

Rachel laughed scornfully. "That's what love is on the lips of a man," she said.

"Yes, Rachel," said Omar, with em-



phasis ; "that's what love is on the lips of a man."

"Well, what was left of me?" she said. "To stay behind in Fez and hear the people laugh and say, 'There goes the Jewish woman that Omar Benani cast away!' No! You had deserted me, rejected me, humiliated me. I had then two objects of revenge."

"And you have worked your will on both," said Omar.

"Yes, I have brought him to marry me. He is my husband—I am his wife."

Omar shuddered. "Better death than such torture," he muttered.

There was silence for a moment, and then Rachel said, speaking quickly, "Was that why you went to Fez? You knew the danger—that to set foot in Fez was all but certain death—was that why you went?"

"The Mahdi sent me," said Omar. "If he finds it good that I should die doing my duty——"



The woman's lip quivered. "Yes, yes," she said, tauntingly, "you are faithful enough to him—no doubt of that."

"I have a double reason. I am his servant, and I have wronged him—wronged him, though he knows it not—wronged him, if not in act, in thought."

"When—where?"

"Here in my heart," said Omar. "That's why I mean to die doing my duty faithfully to the last. No matter when, no matter where, no matter wherefore, I am ready."

Rachel watched him closely; then with a half-smothered cry she dropped at his feet. "Omar, Omar," she cried, "you can never drive love away as they drive a slave."

Omar was trembling; his voice was breaking. "Turn your face from me, Rachel," he said. "When I look at you I am all eyes, when I think of you I am all heart."



"Servant or no servant, wife or no wife, you are mine and I am yours," she said.

"Do not say it, do not wish it," he answered.

She rose to her feet and opened her arms. "I love you! Come to me, come to me."

Omar could struggle no longer. Losing all control, he flung himself into Rachel's arms.

"Talk no more of death," she whispered. "Let the Mahdi die!"

It was a fatal word; it had awakened him as from a trance; he tried to liberate himself. "The Mahdi! What am I doing? God forgive me! Within this hour, before all the people, at the gate, from the daïs, he proclaimed me his successor."

"Omar," she whispered, "you shall live to see it."

"Let me go," said Omar.

He tore himself away from her, and



went out hurriedly by the colonnade. Rachel broke into hysterical laughter, and threw herself on the mattress. "He is mine still," she thought. "He will do my bidding even yet."

## V.

The Mahdi entered the room by the little door at which Hosein had gone out.

"Where is Omar?" he asked.

"Gone," said Rachel, recovering herself.

"So soon!" said the Mahdi. He reflected for a moment, and then said, "Rachel, answer me without fear; have you driven him away?"

Rachel looked amazed. "Why should you say so?" she said.

"I remember what you told me—that he was your lover—that he deserted you at Fez. The past is the past. God Himself cannot wipe it out. Answer



me again ; does your heart still reproach him ? ”

Rachel trembled, but answered, “ No.”

“ You do not shrink from him ? ”

“ No.”

“ You have no secret torture respecting him ? ”

With an effort—“ None.”

The Mahdi was satisfied. “ That is well,” he said. “ Yet perhaps you think, ‘ The Mahdi will not always be with me.’ But take no thought for that. No man will aspire to you when I am gone. In the past, in the present, in the future, you are my wife. You will be the mother of believers, you will be sacred, the track of your footsteps will be honoured, you will belong to the Mahdi, dead or alive. Therefore, welcome my friends as you welcome me.”

Boobker and Asad came into the house. Both looked anxious and distrustful. “ Five hundred of the tribe of Beni Idar will be ready at the mosque,” said Asad.



“Good,” said the Mahdi, “they shall set out at midnight.”

“Then it is true—you are going to Fez,” said Rachel.

“Otba is to go,” said the Mahdi, “and five hundred men are to go with him clad as Berbers. He is to fly to the city, crying, ‘The Mahdi is pursuing us, let us in.’ I am to follow with five thousand, and the same night he is to open the gates to us, and we are to enter and possess the city.”

Boobker shook his head. “A trick, Mohammed, a trick,” he said.

The Mahdi smiled. “Tricks are the devil’s weapons until God wants them, and then it is treason to call them treachery.”

“Beware, beware!” said Boobker. “What do the Jews say: ‘Let him that diggeth a pit for another take heed lest he fall into it himself.’”

Rachel had listened with looks of consternation. “But Otba? Otba, the



Berber?" she said, in a tone of astonishment.

"Have no fear, Rachel," said the Mahdi. "This day he has become a Mahdist. He can be trusted."

"With five hundred men?" said Rachel.

"He is a believer, too, praise be to God," said the Mahdi.

"A believer of one day only, and he is to have five hundred men to lead them to prison or to death!" said Rachel.

"True, the Berbers are unstable as water,—yet Otba alone can enter Fez."

"Then," said Rachel, eagerly, "some one must go with him."

"The counsel is good," said the Mahdi.

"Let me go," said Asad.

"No," said Rachel, promptly. "It must be some one who knows the city well; some one who knows the Basha."

Boobker made an expression of impatience. "Impossible!" he said. "He who knows the Basha, the Basha himself must know."



“Sha ! he can be disguised,” said Rachel.

They all laughed.

“I will go myself,” said the Mahdi.

Rachel clapped her hands. “The man of all men,” she cried. “Who knows Fez so well as the Mahdi?”

Boobker looked doubtfully at her. “Then you are not afraid for him?”

“Afraid?” she said, contemptuously. “I will disguise him myself. A gun-case about his head, and the sheepskin kaftan of a pilgrim—what more is wanted?”

“Bring them to the mosque to-night,” said the Mahdi.

“I will,” said Rachel.

“Bring my sword, too.”

“Yes.”

“And my pilgrim’s girdle.”

“Yes.”

“The selham of the pilgrim as well.”

“Yes, yes,” said Rachel, eagerly. “And with my own hands I will put them on. Afraid?” she replied, mockingly. “I



will go before you to the gate. Yes, and my women with me, playing on their kettledrums."

The Mahdi put his arms about her. "Brave heart of woman?" he cried. "Stronger than the soul of man? It is the work of Islam, and it is I who should begin it."

He began to make preparations. "Asad, find Otba; say I intend to go with him."

"Instantly, Mahdi," said Asad, and he went out.

"And, Father Boobker," said the Mahdi, "do you seek Omar straight-way; say he is to take my place at the head of the five thousand, and enter Fez when we have opened the gates to him."

Boobker shrugged his shoulders, and answered coldly, going out, "My will is yours; yet beware, the pit—the pit!"

But the Mahdi's enthusiasm was kindled. "Into no pit, dug by me or another, can the foot of the Mahdi fall, for the Merciful is mighty," he cried. He



embraced Rachel again. "God give you a good reward! Follow with the five thousand under Omar. You must see the day of Islam's triumph, for the day that we enter Fez will be the day of your own glory. I will be waiting to receive you, ready to put the crown of Islam on your head. Rachel, my soul, my beloved, my wife, my queen!"

He stepped out by the little door at which he had entered.

## VI.

When she was alone Rachel went to a cupboard in the wall and took out the writing materials of the East—the reed pen, the sand, the paper, and the ink.

"At last, at last—the chance I have waited for has come, at last!" she thought.

Then she sat on the mattress and wrote this letter:—



Otba, the Berber, is a traitor, fallen into the toils of the Mahdi. With five hundred men he will claim protection from Fez. One of his company will be a certain great Mahdist in a pilgrim's skirt and hood. Watch for him, receive and reward him as he may deserve. This, in haste and secrecy, from—

A FRIEND OF FEZ.

The letter being finished she stepped to the little door and called "Mubarak! Mubarak!"

A black boy came into the room.

"Mubarak," she whispered, "you have often promised me that you could find your way back to Fez. The time has come to go. Say nothing to any one; saddle the Mahdi's swiftest horse. Take this paper in your hair—so." She rolled up the paper and knotted it in the boy's locks. "When you reach Fez deliver it to the Basha. Show it to no one else. Now go, lose not a moment."

At the next instant the black boy was gone. Rachel called again, "Asma! Asma!"



Asma came, and Rachel said, "Let the girls from the school bring their kettle-drums to the mosque to-night. The Mahdi is leaving for Fez with your father Otba. We are to follow him with Omar."

"O, Othman!" exclaimed Asma, with uplifted eyes.

"I said Omar, child, Omar," said Rachel.

"But I said Othman, and I shall see him again. O joy, joy, joy!"

As Asma went out by the little door Omar returned by the colonnade. Rachel saw him coming, and made a cry of joy. But Omar's face was dark. "What is this that Boobker tells me?" he asked, coldly.

"What was it that *I* told you?" cried Rachel. "You will live to see it, Omar!"

She was going toward him, but Omar recoiled from her.

"What else did you say?" he said, in



a hard voice—"that to set foot in Fez was all but certain death? Yet you are sending the Mahdi there—the Mahdi of all men."

She approached him again.

"Do not touch me. I know you now."

"Omar!"

"From this hour all love dies out of my heart. I hate you, I loath you, I despise you!"

The words smote Rachel as with a blow. "What are you saying?" she cried.

"Traitorous woman! murderess!" said Omar.

"Stop! stop!"

"You are sending your husband to his death."

Stung and degraded, Rachel recovered herself at last. "Even so, what then?" she said, with anger. "Just punishment for sending another to his death before him."

Omar drew his breath hard. "What do you mean?" he said.



“So you have forgotten already!” said Rachel, with a laugh. “Two years ago I asked you to avenge me upon the Mahdi. You wanted to know why. I promised to tell you when the thing was done. It was my secret; and I have kept it until now.”

Omar was trembling. “What is it?” he demanded.

Rachel was now laughing bitterly. “I snatched him from the crowd and took him into my house in Fez; I followed him when you had failed me, and brought him to marry me when you had come with him to Tadla. But I always meant it—I always looked forward to it—at the height of his power, at the topmost reach of his ambition, on that day when the dream of his life came true my bolt should fall.”

“What is it?” said Omar again.

Rachel came closer. She looked into his face.

*“He killed my father.”*



“Oh, my God! my God!” cried Omar, burying his face in both hands. “Rachel,” he cried, in an awful voice, “your bolt *has* fallen—not on the Mahdi, but on me. *I* killed your father.”

Rachel fell back from him. “You?”

“That night—he had turned me out of his house—I came back to taunt him—to tell him that if I could not have his money I should have his daughter, for I loved you, and spite of father or faith or race you should be mine. He struck me—I struck back—he fell—I had killed him—it was for love of you, Rachel, for love of you. And now the fiends themselves must be making a mock of both of us. I am your father’s murderer, but you have chosen me to avenge his murder—you have betrayed the innocent man, but the doom that was meant for him must fall on me.”

Omar went out hurriedly. With a moan, Rachel sank back on the mattress.



The camel driver still sang below the window :

Camel driver, camel driver,  
Where rest ye to-night?  
By the springs of the desert,  
The waters of light.

VII.

It was night inside the mosque of Tadla. The patio was full of people—not men only, as in the older days, but also women and children. Many carried lighted torches, and this was the only illumination. As the people entered they went up to a silver bowl that stood on a stool at the foot of a line of steps and cast in their offerings—some silver, some copper, some their jewels from arms and necks. There was a low hum of many voices. Boobker and Asad were walking in the colonnade.

“No, no, I repeat it,” said Boobker.  
“No matter how great a man may be,



when he undertakes a venture like this he should consult ten of his friends."

"Great ones are not great in friends," said Asad. "What if he has not got ten?"

"Let him consult five friends twice over," said Boobker.

"But what if he has not got five?" said Asad.

"Then let him consult one friend ten times over," said Boobker.

"Nay," said Asad, "but if he stands so high that he has not got even one friend?"

"Then let him consult his wife," said Boobker.

"His wife?"

"Yes," said Boobker, "and whatever she advises let him do the contrary and he is sure to proceed rightly."

Asad laughed and said, "That's just what the Mahdi has done, Boobker."

"It is just what the Mahdi has not



done," said Boobker, "and heaven save us from the consequences!"

A young and beautiful woman came into the mosque in great agitation; it was Fatima, sister of the Mahdi.

"Peace be on you, O Fatima," said Boobker.

"Peace, peace," replied the anxious woman; "where is he?" she said, looking round. "Still to come? Then I am not too late; yet, soon or late, what can I do? Rachel is all in all with him. Oh, is there no man to stand between him and this woman?"

Boobker laughed cynically. "Oh yes," he said, "there is one man to stand between them; would there were not!"

"But has he no friend——" said Fatima.

"A friend, too," said Boobker, "and there is the mischief, for not a word will he hear against him."

There was a shout without—"God save the Mahdi!"



“He is coming!” said Asad.

The Mahdi entered the mosque surrounded by a great throng and accompanied by Otba and El Arby carrying torches. He ascended the line of steps which served for rostrum. The people gathered round; he lifted his hand and began to speak.

“People of Tadla,” he said, “I proclaim a pilgrimage. We are to set out for Fez. Not until Fez has fallen will the Mahdist Empire be complete. Only when we have planted our standard on its Kasbah will Barbary be free. We have to win a dear victory for God; we have to break down the last bulwark of Sodom; we have to restore the ancient faith of Islam. Ours is the duty, ours is the honour—it is war!”

There was a shout of “War! War!”

“People of Fez,” continued the Mahdi, “we are to go back to our birthplace. A year ago you came out to me from the service of its hard masters, from the



doors of its cruel prisons, from the famished army of its Sultan. Your fathers are there still, your sons, your daughters, your sisters, your wives. You are going back to liberate them. You are going home."

There were yet louder shouts of "Home! Home!"

"We go in two companies, the first of five hundred, the second of five thousand. The five hundred shall leave to-night, the five thousand to-morrow. Soldiers of the five thousand, you shall follow under Omar, my comrade, my successor. Obey him, swear fealty to him, come to him from every town, from every house, from every tent; let the women and children of Fez come with you. And God give you a good reward!"

There were deep murmurs of assent.

"Soldiers of the five hundred," said the Mahdi, "I myself will lead you.



Yours is the greatest honour, it is also the greatest danger—we will share them together.”

At that moment, by a side entrance near to the steps, Rachel came into the mosque, followed by Asma, who was carrying the pilgrim garments, and an Arab soldier who was bearing a sword and flintlock. At the same time Omar, who had stood in the crowd, stepped forward and said, “Mahdi, my lord, reverse your order, and let me lead with the five hundred.”

Rachel heard him. She was very pale, her lips quivered, her hands were restless, her eyes wandered from face to face.

“Why?” said the Mahdi.

“First,” said Omar, “because it best beseems the liberator of his country to enter Fez with five thousand, not with five hundred; with triumph, not by treachery; with dignity, not in disguise.”



The Mahdi bowed his head. "What next?" he asked.

"Next," said Omar, "no dress will disguise the Mahdi from the people of his own province. There is only one face such as the face of Mohammed Abd-er-Rahman, and the men of Fez all know it."

Omar had spoken firmly, resolutely, almost angrily.

"The tongue is the tongue of an enemy," said the Mahdi, "but the heart is the heart of a friend." Then he turned to the people. "Companions of my exile," he said, "I will listen to you; what do you advise?"

Boobker stepped out. "Master," he said, with a significant accent, "let Omar go first with the five hundred. He knows Fez, he knows the Basha. He can do all that the Mahdi can do, and run no risk."

Fatima had been standing by in visible agitation. The Mahdi turned to



her, and said, "Fatima, it is your turn."

"Brother," said Fatima, in tremulous tones, "let Omar go with Otba. The last man the Basha will look for is the man who has just left him."

Rachel had been struggling hard to control her emotion. The Mahdi noticed this. "And Rachel?" he said.

"Do not listen to them," she burst out in a choking voice.

There was some movement among the Mahdi's followers.

"Your reasons, Rachel, your reasons?" said the Mahdi.

Rachel tried to speak, began, stopped, began again, and finally said, "I do not know—I cannot think. *But do not let Omar go with Otba.*"

Boobker exchanged glances with Asad. Fatima looked eagerly into the Mahdi's face. Omar's eyes were on the ground. Rachel was violently agitated. The crowd caught the contagion of her emo-



tion. The one man in the mosque with self-control was the Mahdi himself. "Why not?" he asked, calmly.

Rachel began to stammer an explanation. "I—I—I—" She could get no further. "What shall I say? How can I speak?" she thought. Then she cried aloud, "Do not torture me."

There was a murmur of astonishment among the people, but the Mahdi smiled. "Rachel, my wife, I understand you," he said, tenderly. "Your pride has conquered your love. This is the work of Islam, and you would fain see no man but your husband at the head of it."

Rachel drew her breath with relief, but Fatima cried, "No, no, no!" and Boobker nodded his head.

The Mahdi was still unmoved. "Fatima, my sister, I understand you also," he said, as tenderly as before. "Your love has conquered your pride. This is the hour of Islam's danger, and you



would fain see any man but your brother at the front of it."

The commotion in the mosque was now great. Omar made one step up to the rostrum. "Mahdi," he said, "I am ready—which is it to be?"

The Mahdi hesitated for a moment. Then he said, "The people shall decide. Congregation of Tadla, you have heard what has been said. Now give me your voice, and give it without fear. The Mahdi or Omar—which?"

At that there was a universal shout of "Omar! Omar!"

The Mahdi listened, bent his head and answered, "Omar it shall be. And do not fear that I grudge your choice. That name is a sound more welcome to me than rain in a desert land." Then taking a step down to the place where Omar stood, he put one hand on his shoulder, and said, "Omar, my successor, my friend, my brother!"

Amid the tumult in the mosque,



Rachel's emotion at that moment was observed by one man only ; that man was Omar. He slipped to her side and whispered, "Be silent ; your secret shall die with me. Let mine end with you."

But Rachel could not control herself. "No, no !" she cried aloud.

"Love him, honour him. Farewell !" whispered Omar.

"It shall not be," cried Rachel. Then turning to Asma, she said, in a low voice, "Run, girl, run ; search the town again ; see if the black boy is gone. Tell him not to go."

Asma went off like a gleam. The Mahdi had returned to the rostrum.

"Larby," he called, "go for my own horse ; it shall be my parting gift to Omar."

Larby went out on the errand.

"And, Rachel, said the Mahdi, "let all the honours that you meant for the Mahdi be done to Omar."



"I cannot—I will not——" Rachel began.

"Nay," said the Mahdi; "do not grudge him one of them."

Rachel's emotion was mastering her. "He will never come back," she muttered.

Boobker had returned to her side. "What did you say?" he asked. And Fatima, who was near, repeated the question.

Rachel was caught in her own trap. "Nothing, nothing but——" she said, and stopped again as she looked into the faces about her. "How they watch me!" she thought.

Boobker's little eyes twinkled suspiciously. "Would you still have the Mahdi go?" he asked.

Rachel was in torment. "No, neither—neither now—neither Omar nor my husband. It is *death*——"

Boobker lifted his eyebrows.

"What?" said Fatima.



Omar touched Rachel's gown. "Hush, hush!" he whispered.

Rachel's tongue was tied. She could neither speak nor make sign—neither tell her husband of the fate that awaited Omar in Fez, for that would be to betray her design on his own life; nor suffer the murderer of her father to go to the death she had prepared, for that would be to kill him for the crime that came of his love of herself.

"Come, Rachel," said the Mahdi, "the sheepskin kaftan of the pilgrim—the selham—with your own hands you shall dress him."

There was no help for it. She was compelled to do to her lover as she had promised to do to her husband. With a mighty effort she took up the garments, where Asma had left them, and put them on to Omar. All eyes were upon her. The Mahdi was watching every movement. "Now my girdle," he said.



With yet greater effort she took the pilgrim scarf and girded it on to Omar.

"Now my sword," said the Mahdi.

She girded the sword on to Omar.

"Good!" said the Mahdi.

There was a sound of distant music.

"What noise is that?" cried Rachel.

A line of girls came down the corridor of the mosque, playing on kettle-drums.

"Your maidens, Rachel, your maidens!" said the Mahdi.

But Rachel was now beside herself with terror. "Who sent for them?" she cried. Then she checked herself. All was not yet lost. "Where is Asma?" she thought.

Larby came back to the Mahdi's side. "Your horse is not in the stable, my lord!" he said.

At the same moment Asma returned to Rachel. "The black boy has gone," she whispered.

"No matter," cried the Mahdi. "Ra-



chel, lead your maidens before him to the gate. Are you ready?"

"What must be, must be," thought Rachel. Then snatching a tambourine from one of the girls and laughing hysterically, she cried, "Yes, ready! ready!"

"The music! Strike up!" cried the Mahdi. He stood on the topmost step, took a torch from a bystander, and held it high over his head.

The crowd parted. Rachel took her place at the head of the girls. With a terrible effort she tried to walk on, jauntily, and play the tambourine that was in her hand. The girls struck up. Everybody was stirring. As Omar passed out of the mosque Rachel, with a wild scream, fell to the ground.

"She has swooned," said somebody.

The Mahdi lifted her tenderly in his arms. "Let us carry her home," he said. "Poor Rachel! The disappointment has been too much for her."



## FOURTH PART.

### I.

It was night on the plains outside Fez. An Eastern town is dark when the day is done. Only a pale streak of light in the sky hung over the city. It went out as the night advanced.

Omar's five hundred had been three days within the walls. The Mahdi's five thousand had arrived under cover of the darkness, and their women and children lay in the tents that had been pitched behind. At midnight the army gathered noiselessly about the Mahdi's tent and repeated the Fatihah, the first prayer of the Koran: "*El hamdu l'Illah, Rabb el âálameen, er-Rahmán, er-Raheem, Málek yom ed-deen.*"

The Mahdi rose and said, "Now to your tents, my people. Lie there until



the hour before daybreak. Then at the voice of the Mooddin rise, form into line, and march, each company at the call of its Kaid. No noise, no singing, no talking, no laughter—not a sound. Let everything be done in silence. We are now within gunshot of the city, and have to take it by surprise. Remember, brothers, we are going home.”

There were murmurs of joy among the people.

“Once there we shall lay down these arms for ever. So God give us a safe return!”

“Ameen! Ameen!” muttered the soldiers. Then they trooped off to the tents. The Mahdi was left in the company of his first followers.

“Asad,” he said, “you are to watch the eastern gate.”

“Right, my lord,” said Asad, and he went out on that errand.

“Larby, you are to watch the gate to the east.”



"Right, Sidi," said Larby, and he followed Asad.

"Boobker," said the Mahdi, "set a cordon round the city; we don't know the gate from which Omar may signal."

"It shall be done, Mohammed," said Boobker.

"Let there be scouts from every gate to the camp, and if a stranger crosses the line take him prisoner; we can run no risks."

"As you wish."

"I shall not sleep to-night; bring me word whatever happens."

"Good."

"The night is dark; no moon, no stars. Heaven fights for us. It covers the sky with a pall that our tents may not be seen from the city walls. Thus in the darkness does God's face shine upon us still."

"All is well—thus far," said Boobker.

"All *will* be well," said the Mahdi.



"I know it! I feel it! You have no misgivings?"

Boobker answered doubtfully, "Umph! Misgivings are not for me. I go to my post. God bless your morning, Mahdi." He went off with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Your morning be blessed!" answered the Mahdi.

Fatima was near, and little Hosein was lying asleep on an upturned saddle.

"The air is chill," said the Mahdi. "Take the little one into the tent. Ah! The brave little warrior! He was to have fought with demons till daybreak. But see, he is overcome already. The gentle sleep has conquered him."

He lifted Hosein in his arms and kissed him, then passed him to his mother.

"Have *you* no misgivings, brother?" said Fatima.

"None!" said the Mahdi. "God



willing and all men faithful, we shall enter Fez with the dawn."

"God give thee peace," said Fatima, going towards their tent.

"And thou!" said the Mahdi; and Fatima and the child went in.

Rachel was at the tent mouth. "Then you do not fear treachery?" she said, nervously.

"Why should I?" said the Mahdi. "Treachery is like thieving—it must first be some one's hope to gain by it."

"And is there no one to gain by the fall of the Mahdi?" said Rachel.

The Mahdi stretched out his arm. "Look!" he said. "Five thousand men lie in the tents around us, and as many women and children in the tents behind. They are waiting to return to their homes in yonder city. Treachery would injure me; but it would hurt the traitor more."

"You are right, Mohammed, it would hurt the traitor more," said Rachel.



Then falteringly, "Still, who knows; there may be some one——"

"None, my beloved," said the Mahdi. "They were true to me through hunger and thirst and defeat. And will they betray me now? Not one in all that ten thousand has a soul so mean."

Rachel answered in a breaking voice, "Nevertheless, some man—some *woman*, maybe."

"No woman will betray me," said the Mahdi.

"Yet women are treacherous from passion as well as greed," said Rachel.

The Mahdi embraced her. "Rachel," he said, "there is only one woman in the world whose passion touches me, and she is nestling in my arms."

Rachel trembled yet more. "Then you trust me, Mohammed?"

"With all my heart, beloved."

"And love me?"

"With all my soul."



Rachel began to weep. "I can bear no more. Mohammed!" she said.

"What? Crying again?" said the Mahdi. "To think that the weak little woman who torments herself with these foolish fears was the angel who stood by me in the storm!"

Every word was coals of fire to her. "Mohammed, I have something to tell you," she faltered.

But the Mahdi was looking towards the walls. "Stay; what light is this?" he said. "One of the scouts returning?" Then he called, "Peace!"

A voice outside answered, "Peace!"

"Out with the light, man, out!" cried the Mahdi.

"The precaution is needless; I bring bad news," said the man, coming up.

"Boobker!" cried the Mahdi, in surprise.

"Too late," thought Rachel.

"Omar and Otba are prisoners in the



Kasbah, and the five hundred are in chains," said Boobker.

"Who dares to say so?" cried the Mahdi, with passion. "Tell him it is a lie."

"It is true, Mohammed," said Boobker; "you are betrayed."

"Betrayed? No, no; I tell you no," said the Mahdi.

"I tell you yes, Mohammed. Your cause is lost."

There was a sound of voices approaching.

"What noise is that?" said the Mahdi.

"They are bringing up the messenger of the betrayer," said Boobker.

"Then it must be true," the Mahdi muttered.

"He was riding your own horse, Mohammed," said Boobker; "the one you missed at Tadla. We captured him as he was coming out of the city by the western gate."

"Who is it?"



“Your wife’s black servant.”

“Mubarak?”

“Mubarak!”

The terrified black boy was brought up to the Mahdi’s tent in the hands of Asad and Larby. Soldiers were behind, shouting, “Kill him!”

“Who sent you?” Asad demanded of the boy.

“I’ll tell no more,” said the negro.

“The name of the man who sent you?” said Asad, with uplifted hand.

“Never,” said Mubarak.

“Torment will make his tongue wag. The thongs — where are they?” said Asad.

The negro began to scream. “No, no, not that. Don’t torture me!” he cried. —

Then, seeing the Mahdi, he broke away from Asad and Larby, and flung himself at the leader’s feet, kissed his slippers and the skirt of his kaftan, and cried, “Mercy, my lord, mercy! I take refuge



with God and with you. Save me and I will tell all. Send these men away and I will tell you everything. My lord, my lord ! Save me, save me, I beg, I beseech, I pray ! ”

The soldiers were unmoved. They shouted for vengeance.

“ Silence ! ” cried the Mahdi. He motioned the people away. The men went off slowly, all save Boobker. Rachel was still standing in the half darkness at the door of the tent.

“ My boy,” said the Mahdi, gently, “ you have come out of Fez ? ”

“ Yes, my lord, yes,” said Mubarak.

“ You saw Omar arrested, and Otba sent to prison, and the five hundred soldiers put into chains ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; I will tell my lord everything.”

“ You took a message into Fez ? ”

“ Yes, yes ; a letter—a letter to the Basha.”

“ From some one in Tadla ? ”



“Yes; I will tell my lord everything—from some one in Tadla.”

“What treacherous man was it, my boy?”

“No man at all, my lord. See, I am telling my lord everything.”

“Was it a woman?” asked the Mahdi, with astonishment.

“Yes, master, a woman. I keep nothing back.”

“What woman, then?” said the Mahdi.

Rachel was swaying the canvas of the tent in her agitation. When the black boy raised his head to reply, he saw her for the first time.

“No, no! I cannot tell you that,” he said.

The Mahdi had seen the direction of the boy's gaze. “Speak, boy,” he said, in an altered tone. “You shall be safe. I will protect you. What woman was it?”

The black boy struggled with him-



self, and then cried, "Master, I dare not."

The Mahdi took the boy by the shoulder. "There is a traitor in my camp," he said, sternly; "I must know who it is. What woman, boy; what woman?"

"Do not ask me, master," cried the boy.

"What woman?" repeated the Mahdi. "Tell me, I command you."

"No," said the boy; "I will *never* tell you."

The Mahdi paused; then with his face half turned to where Rachel stood, he said: "I must give you back to the soldiers."

"Oh, you won't do that, my lord!" the boy pleaded.

"I must give you back to the soldiers," repeated the Mahdi. His eyes wandered; he seemed to be waiting for an answer elsewhere.

"My lord, my master, my Sultan, you



won't do that. They will torture me. The thongs—think of it! My lord will not give me back to the soldiers! No, no, my lord, my Sultan——”

The boy in his terror kissed the Mahdi's feet. “Asad! Larby!” cried the Mahdi.

Asad and Larby were at his side in a moment.

The boy clutched at the Mahdi's hand. “Mercy! mercy!” he cried. “See, my lord shall kill me.” He tore open the breast of his jellab. “Kill me, my lord, kill me!”

Rachel came between them. “Mohammed,” she said, “let the boy go. *I* can tell you the rest.”

The Mahdi loosened the boy's grasp. “At last! Rachel!” he thought. “Then it is true. Oh, God, be gracious to my father! Let me think. Let me think——”

After a moment he said, “Soldiers, let the boy go free.”



The negro kissed the hand of the Mahdi, and went off, followed by Asad and Larby.

“Boobker,” continued the Mahdi, “wait within hail—I shall want you presently.”

Boobker comprehended everything.

“What did I say at the beginning?” he thought. “The pit! the pit!”

## II.

The Mahdi stood some moments like a man in a trance. Rachel approached him meekly. “Mohammed!” she said.

“What woman sent that letter?” said the Mahdi, sternly.

“Mahdi!” said Rachel, pleadingly.

“What woman sent that letter?” repeated the Mahdi.

“Husband!” cried Rachel.

“What woman sent that letter?” thundered the Mahdi.



"*I did,*" said Rachel, and she dropped her head, overwhelmed with her shame.

"God of grace and mercy! Was this what you meant to tell me?"

"Yes."

"Was this the reason of your fears?"

"Yes."

"I see it all. Fool, to think that I was the only man your passion paltered with. There is another—Omar, my friend, my comrade, my successor."

"Omar!"

"You have never forgiven him," said the Mahdi. "He dishonoured you by deserting you a year ago. Your heart has not ceased to reproach him. You have sent him to his death. You have revenged yourself at last."

Rachel trembled at the error. Not even yet did the Mahdi know the truth, not even yet did he realize the depth of her treachery. "What am I to say?" she thought.

"The past was the past," said the



Mahdi, "but God Himself had all but wiped it out. You were not the mistress of Omar because you were the wife of his master. If Omar had wronged you, you were above him. Mercy becomes the great, and it would have been your glory to forgive. But no, you must wait and watch for your revenge. You must keep your wounds green. You must remember your dishonour when all the world had forgotten it."

Rachel sank at his feet. "God help me, what am I to say?"

The Mahdi laid hold of her hands with terrible anger. "Confess it!" he cried, in an awful voice. "It was to revenge yourself on Omar that you sent that letter? Confess it! On Omar—on Omar?"

Rachel could bear it no longer. "No, no, not on Omar," she cried.

"Not on Omar? Then on whom!"

"Yourself," said Rachel.

The Mahdi let go his hold of her.



She fell face downwards at his feet. There was an awful silence.

"Myself! Myself!" muttered the Mahdi.

Rachel was sobbing audibly.

"The darkness makes me dizzy. Is there no light in heaven? Myself! Myself?" muttered the Mahdi again.

"Have mercy! Have mercy!" sobbed Rachel.

The Mahdi recovered himself. "When did you dispatch your message?" he asked.

"Before Omar was chosen," she answered.

"Had you thought of it when you persuaded me to go with Otba?"

"God forgive me! I had."

"Were you still thinking of it when you fainted in the mosque?"

"Miserable woman, I was."

"Did Omar know anything about it?"

"No."

"I have been blind," said the Mahdi,



in the wretchedness of his soul. "Blind, blind, blind! Not hatred of Omar, but love of him inspired that letter. Oh, heart of woman, who can read it?"

Rachel was still sobbing. "Forgive me, wretched woman as I am, forgive me——" she began.

"Allah! Allah!" cried the Mahdi, and he smote his breast. "You said to yourself, 'The Mahdi shall go to Fez, but my letter shall go before him.' No? Yes?"

"Yes, Mohammed, yes."

"And when you saw Omar step into the place you had meant for me, you thought, 'The letter I wrote to betray my husband will kill my lover instead.'"

"Have mercy! Oh, have mercy," said the miserable woman.

"You meant to change your husband, not your rank. When the Mahdi had fallen, you were to be the wife of the Mahdi still—Omar, not Mohammed. That was your hope—deny it."



“Let me speak—let me explain——”

“And Omar—what of him? There has been double treachery in this, and the greater half has been his.”

“No, no!”

“I thought him my best friend,” said the Mahdi; “he has been my worst enemy. I could have sworn to his truth; but he is guilty, guilty, guilty.”

“No, no; Omar is not to blame,” cried Rachel.

The Mahdi laughed scornfully. “Yes, yes, the old story—it’s a woman’s ancient artifice to shield the guilty man. It’s only the innocent one that she will sacrifice. But the trick has failed her this time.”

“Hear me,” said Rachel. “I alone have been guilty. Omar——”

“Omar has fallen into the trap that was meant for me,” said the Mahdi. “But that is not enough for my vengeance. He is a prisoner in the Kasbah; that is only the punishment of his offence against the Basha. But he has offended



against my honour, and he shall answer to me for his disloyalty and his sin." He put his hand to his mouth and called, "Boobker, Boobker!"

"What are you going to do?" cried Rachel.

"Silence, woman," said the Mahdi. "What more is there to say?"

Boobker came back. The Mahdi said, "Send the white flag to the walls of the city. Call for the Basha. Say the Mahdi sends 'Peace to all believers,' and asks what hostage the city demands that it may deliver up to him for one hour—to be delivered back to it dead or alive—Omar, son of Benani."

"Good," said Boobker, and went off on his errand.

Rachel's sobs had deepened to groans of terror, but now clinging to her husband, and speaking vehemently, she said, "Mohammed, you *shall* hear me. Omar is innocent, and beware what you do to him. Hear me! Not until you know



my heart can you judge my crime. Then do what you will with me. I will tell you all. My life by your side has been a deception from the first."

The Mahdi turned away impatiently.

"Nay, listen, for God's own sake listen. I loved you from the first."

The Mahdi tried to liberate himself.

"Yes, yes, it is true—it is true; but when Omar attempted your life in Fez, it was I who prompted him."

"Have done, have done," said the Mahdi.

"When I followed you to Tadla and pretended to forsake my faith and embrace your Islam, I was deceiving you. When I married you, I was deceiving you again. But not for love of Omar—no,——"

The Mahdi could hear no more. "Torture me with that name no longer," he said, and he liberated himself from her grasp.

Rachel came nervously to his side



again. "Mohammed, husband, do not cast me utterly away," she said in a voice of deep emotion. "Let me follow you and serve you. Whatever fate awaits you let me share it. I do not ask to be your wife. That is past—lost—forfeited. Let me be your servant, your handmaiden, your slave. Do not say no. Do not turn from me. All along my love for you has been fighting in my heart with hate."

"Love?" said the Mahdi, "do you talk of love to me again? Turn down that page of life for ever."

Boobker came back.

"What news? What hostage?" cried the Mahdi.

"An impossible one, Mohammed," said Boobker; "two of the nearest of kin to the Mahdi, and a thousand men."

"They shall be sent," said the Mahdi, promptly. Then, calling, "Asad! Larby!"

Asad came up. "A thousand men to



the city as hostages for Omar." Asad saluted and went out.

Then calling again, "Fatima! Hosein!"

Fatima came out of the tent carrying Hosein in her arms. She was wearing the Moorish woman's blanket over her head and shoulders. The Mahdi embraced her. "My sister," he said, tenderly, "you are to go into Fez with Hosein as hostage for one hour. Have no fear. I will ransom you."

He kissed her forehead and took Hosein out of her arms. "My son, my warrior, my lion-hearted lad, now's your time to be brave," he said. "Did you not say you would be the first to enter Fez? You shall! you shall! Farewell! Only for one hour, farewell." Then, with a great struggle, "I will ransom you. As sure as I live I will ransom you! Farewell!"

Kissing the boy passionately he went hurriedly into the tent.



Fatima, half bewildered, looked round to Boobker. "What does it mean?" she said with fear.

"Mean?" said Boobker, scornfully. "That another man has been betrayed by the beauty in a woman's face."

"But Fez—we are to go as hostages—hostages for what?—for whom?"

"For Omar," said Boobker. "Did I not tell you that there was a man to stand between them?"

Fatima was terrified. "We shall never return," she cried. "They will kill us. I dare not go. Oh, oh, oh!"

She dropped to the ground, and the blanket fell from her head.

"Fainted, poor child. Let me carry her in," said Boobker. "This is what it comes to—oh! miserable is the man who builds his house on the deep pit that is a harlot's heart."

He carried Fatima back to the tent. Rachel was standing aside with her face covered by her hands.



“Cruel, cruel! False too; yet I deserve it all. Oh, that I could atone for my misdeed! Is there no way left? Heaven direct me; show me; speak to me.”

Little Hosein, who had been half asleep where the Mahdi had left him, near to the mouth of the tent, now came drowsily to her side and tugged at her dress.

“Rachel!” he whimpered, “the Mahdi said I was to be the first to go into Fez—and mother has—mother is—who is to take me now?”

“Heaven *has* spoken!” thought Rachel. “Call *me* mother, Hosein, and *I* will take you.”

“Will you?” said the boy.

“Yes, yes.”

There was a voice outside the camp.  
“Peace! Peace!”

“The soldiers from Fez,” thought Rachel. She snatched up Fatima’s blanket from the place where it lay,



covered her head and answered, "Peace!"

Two soldiers came up to the tent mouth. "Fatima, sister of the Mahdi, and Hosein her son—in which tent shall we find them?" they asked.

Rachel lifted Hosein into her arms and answered, "Here, here; we are ready!"

At the next moment all four had gone together.

### III.

In the earliest light of morning a young man out of Fez came creeping, lamp in hand, towards the tents of the Mahdi.

"Asma!" he cried in whispers.

The girl knew his voice and came out to him.

"Othman!" she cried, and they fell into each others' arms.

"Crying already!"



"Isn't it a whole year since I saw you last?" the girl blubbered.

"She can't help it, being only a woman," said Othman, wiping his own eyes by stealth. "But hush! listen! I'm here on a dangerous mission. Where's the Mahdi?"

"In his tent," said Asma.

"Good," said Othman. "He thinks his cause is lost, but he'll conquer yet. When Omar and your father came in disguise and were detected they were thrown into the Kasbah, and the Basha made me their gaoler. 'Now's my chance,' I thought, 'to win my little Asma from Otba.'"

"Well, well?"

"Well, I puzzled and puzzled, and didn't know what to do."

"Well, well?" repeated Asma, impatiently.

"Well, I was driven to my wit's end."

"That couldn't have been very far, Othman," said Asma, with a saucy beat



of her foot. "If your wit wasn't quicker than your tongue no wonder it ran no great distance."

"Ha! ha! ha! Do you know, Asma, they say your great-great-great-great-grandfather was the best storyteller in Morocco? Well, my chance came at last — to-day — to-night — an hour ago. When the white flag arrived from the Mahdi the Basha said to his Kaid, 'Razor cut razor—treason cut treason—he tried to betray us, let us betray him.' Then he came for me. 'Othman,' he said, 'go quickly to the Kaid of the Berbers. Tell him the Mahdi lies outside these walls, and ask him to send me five thousand men to-night and we'll catch the rascal like a rat in a trap.'"

"Well, well?"

"Well, then I went to your father in prison. 'Otba,' I whispered, 'if I bring back five thousand of the Mahdi's men instead of the Kaid's will you give me your daughter Asma?' 'Turn Mahdist,'



he said, 'and I will.' 'I've been one all my life,' I answered—that was a lie, but no matter. 'Then it's done,' he cried—and here I am. What's this? Crying again! Oh, this is a sweet world!"

"How can I help it *being only a woman?*" said Asma. "I'll run and kiss little Hosein—just for joy of the good news."

"Wait, wait, wait!" cried Othman. "If kissing will relieve your feelings couldn't you now——"

"Couldn't I—what?"

"Couldn't you kiss me instead?" and he tipped up her chin and kissed her.

"It was very clever of you to think of that, Othman," said Asma.

"The kissing?"

"The way to catch my father."

"Oh, it wasn't I that thought of it. It was the saints. Every morning I went to the Saints' House and prayed, 'Holy saints show me how to win my little Asma.'"



“But what will the saints say when they know you’ve told my father a lie?”

“Oh, well—umph!” faltered Othman, “the saints were flesh and blood themselves once, so they’ll have a fellow-feeling. But I must be off, Asma. Listen—I’ve arranged everything but one thing, and now I’ve something for you to do.”

“Yes? Yes?”

“Watch for a light on yonder wall. When you see it tell the Mahdi that the gates of Fez are open to him, and he may enter the city without striking a blow.”

“Oh, the good news! I’ll run and kiss little Hosein again.”

“Pity to trouble him!” He kissed her again. “Besides, I saw him going off with his mother as Omar’s hostage. Good-bye! Good-bye!”



## IV.

As Othman returned to Fez he passed a guard of soldiers coming out with Omar.

"His sister and her son, you say?" said Omar.

"His sister and her son," said one of the soldiers.

"As my hostages?"

"As your hostages."

"Into that den of leopards?"

"Into Fez, Sidi."

"How he loves me!" said Omar. "Fatima and little Hosein—they are the apple of his eye. God's face shine on him for ever!"

When they came within speech of the Mahdi, Omar ran forward and kissed the hem of his selham. "My dear master!" he cried.

The Mahdi held him off. "Not so quick, Sidi," he said.

"Mahdi!" cried Omar, in astonishment.



The Mahdi brushed past him to the soldiers. "Have the hostages gone into the city?" he asked.

"They have gone," said the soldiers.

"Did they go willingly?"

"Willingly."

"And cheerfully?"

"Cheerfully."

"God bless them!" muttered the Mahdi. "My Fatima! My little Hosein! All I have left." Then aloud, "Within the hour, that is the word, is it not?"

"That is the word,—within the hour," said the soldier.

"Alive or *dead*?" said the Mahdi, with significant emphasis.

"Alive or dead," repeated the soldier.

"Leave your prisoner with me and come back when the time is up." Then he added, with still more significant emphasis, "He will be ready."

The soldiers left them together. Omar looked nervously at the Mahdi in the



light of the fire that now burnt at the tent mouth. "The Mahdi is ill; his eyes are swollen; his lips are white. Something has happened," he said anxiously.

"You are right," said the Mahdi, coldly. "Something *has* happened. Approach! Nearer, man; make no more faces."

Omar came up with a bewildered look. "Master!" he cried again.

"That sword—where did you get it?" said the Mahdi, pointing to the weapon at Omar's side.

"From you, Mahdi," said Omar. "It is the sword you gave me at Tadla. Oh, it is a noble blade, as firm as friendship and as true as love."

"Give it back," said the Mahdi.

"Mahdi!"

"Give it back."

Omar unbuckled his sword and delivered it to the Mahdi, who flung it to the ground behind him.



"That pilgrim's girdle—where did it come from?" said the Mahdi.

"From you, master," said Omar. "In the mosque on the night when I set out for Fez you commanded Rachel to gird it on me. It was the mark of your trust and of my honour."

"Unfasten it," said the Mahdi.

There was a moment's hesitation, and then Omar unfastened his girdle and gave it to the Mahdi, who flung it after the sword.

"That selham of green—how did you come by it?"

"You commanded Rachel to clothe me with this also," said Omar. "It was the mantle of the Mahdi, when he was a pilgrim, in the days before God had called him."

"Take it off," said the Mahdi.\*

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\* The author acknowledges some obligations here to an unacted drama by Count Henri de Bornier.



Omar took off the hooded cloak reluctantly. The Mahdi held it in his hands a moment and said, "Have you given back all I gave you?"

"All."

"It is a lie!" cried the Mahdi.

"Mohammed Abd er Rahman!"

"The trust I gave you—where is that?" cried the Mahdi. "The faith, the confidence, the love I squandered upon you—where are they?"

"What is this? What have I done?" said Omar, with looks of wonder.

"What have you done? Borrowed fifty talents from me and brought me back these rags," said the Mahdi, casting the selham after the girdle.

Omar braced himself up. "Tell me what I have done!" he said. "I demand to know it."

"What have you done?" said the Mahdi, hotly. "Broken faith and become a villain."

Omar held himself under control.



“To whom have I been faithless?” he asked.

“Ask your own heart,” said the Mahdi.

“It beats for your cause, Mohammed.”

“Think of your treacheries.”

“They are only treacheries to your enemies.”

“Remember the pit you have fallen into.”

Omar hesitated; then he said, “It is the pit that was meant for you.”

The Mahdi laughed scornfully. “So you know it!” he said. “You know who has been your betrayer—and mine.” Omar’s expression changed. “Ah, you need play the fool’s face no longer. She has confessed everything.”

“Everything?” There was a long silence. Omar covered his face in his shame.

“Oh, Omar, Omar!” cried the Mahdi, “how I trusted you! But trust and



love are gone. You have been the enemy in my heart's heart. You have wrecked my hopes in the hour of their fulfilment. You have made ashes of the expectations of my poor exiled people on the day when they were returning home. You have uncovered my nakedness and made me a thing to point the finger at. You have turned my heart to stone, and you shall give me satisfaction to the full."

In the torrent of his anger he laid hold of Omar by both shoulders. "To your knees!" he cried, and forced him down.

Omar made no resistance. "Master, my lord," he cried, "cast me down to the place from which you raised me, but let me live—let me live to renew my trust."

"You have lived too long already."

"Give me one month."

"I gave you twelve."

"One week—one day!"



“Too late !” cried the Mahdi ; and he drew his sword. “Die, adulterer !”

At that word Omar sprang to his feet with terrible passion. “Adulterer !” he cried ; “kill me by what other name you will, but adulterer—no !”

The Mahdi paused. “Will you damn your soul as well ?” he said. “Dare you deny it at the Judgment ?”

“Send me there,” cried Omar, “and as sure as the Lord lives I will witness against you.”

The Mahdi’s sword dropped in his hand, and the point dragged on the ground. “Omar never lied to me—never. But the very snare you have fallen into witnesses against you,” he said.

“I have fallen into no snare,” said Omar. “My eyes were open when I walked into it.”

“What ?”

“It is the truth. You have torn it from me, but it is the truth.”



"You knew that treachery was afoot?"

Omar bowed his head. "I knew that treachery was afoot."

"And that it was meant for me?"

"And that it was meant for you."

"Knowing that, you took my place?"

"Knowing that, I took your place."

"Having no hope of the succession or of her?"

"Having no hope of the succession or of—her."

"Going to your death that I might live?"

"Going to my death that you might live."

The Mahdi seemed to gasp. "Oh God!" he muttered. "I grow dizzy. The darkness comes again. My strength fails me." With a great struggle to restrain himself he dropped to his knees at Omar's feet. "Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" he cried.

Omar raised him up. "Nay, master,"



he said, "it is for you to forgive. I could not command my heart, but I am your servant still."

"My brother! My brother!" cried the Mahdi; "yet your innocence only makes *her* guilt the blacker. She shall confess it before you."

He was stepping towards the mouth of the tent when Omar interposed.

"Wait! She has done *me* no wrong. It is *I* who have injured her."

"You speak in riddles, brother."

"Don't ask me to read them—they are the story of my crime."

"Crime!"

"She knows the truth at last," said Omar. "I confessed it to her at Tadla—it was I who killed her father."

"Killed her father," repeated the Mahdi.

Omar's face was down. "It was on the night I was thrown into prison for debt. I asked the old Jew for the money. He refused, and turned me out



of the house. I went back mad with rage and drunk with wine. He struck me. I struck back—and—I know no more. You had just left him, and she thought—she concluded——”

The Mahdi saw everything as in a mirror. “Merciful Allah!” he cried. “Was this what she tried to tell me?”

“It was my secret,” said Omar. “She could not tell you. Forgive her, Mahdi. All she did was done in blindness. Her punishment is sore. She took her revenge out of God’s hands, and see! God has avenged Himself on the avenger. Now, call her.”

The Mahdi paused; then with great emotion he called again, “Rachel! Rachel!”

“Brother,” answered the woman who came from the tent. It was Fatima. Boobker was with her.

“Fatima!” exclaimed the Mahdi, in bewilderment.



"She fainted, and has just recovered," said Boobker.

"Then who is it that has gone into Fez?"

They looked into each other's faces.

"Have the soldiers come?" said Boobker.

"Yes, and gone," said the Mahdi.

"Was it a woman who went with them?"

"So they said."

"Was it—Rachel?" said Omar.

"Where did you leave her?" asked the Mahdi.

"Here, with the child," said Boobker.

"Hosein! Hosein!" called Fatima, but there was no answer.

"It must have been she—Rachel, my wife, my love!" cried the Mahdi.

The sky to the north-east was lightening. A long, low wail came out of the distance. It was the voice of the Mooddin from beyond the city walls: "God is great."



Asad came up with an anxious face.

"Mahdi," he said, "the camp is stirring and there is a disaffection everywhere. The rumor goes that we are betrayed, and that you know the betrayer."

"What am I to say? What? What?" muttered the Mahdi.

Larby came up hurriedly. "Mahdi," he cried, "the people are demanding the life of the betrayer—where is he?"

"Where, Rachel, where? In my own heart—in my own bosom."

There were deep murmurs from the tents. A company of soldiers came up to the Mahdi's quarters.

"Mahdi," said one of the soldiers, "what of the promises you made us a year ago?"

"Who brought us from our homes to lead us into this trap?" said another

"We have been fooled," said a third.

Others shouted, "The traitor! The traitor! Give him up!"



"Silence, ingrates!" cried Omar.

The soldiers returned from Fez. They had come back for their prisoner.

"He shall not go," cried the Mahdi.

"Remember Rachel and little Hosein," said Omar.

"God lead me! God give me light!" cried the Mahdi.

"Within the hour—that was the word—dead or alive," said one of the soldiers.

"Then," said the Mahdi, passionately, "he shall go back alive, and I will go with him."

"And I!" cried Boobker.

"And I!" "And I!" "And I!" cried many voices at once. At that moment Asma was seen to approach the Mahdi. "The light!" she cried. "The light on the walls! See!"

"Well?" said the Mahdi.

"The gates of Fez are open," said Asma. "Othman has opened them. He was sent out for the Berbers, but he has opened the gates to us."



“Forward all!” cried Omar, in a voice of thunder.

And the army of the Mahdi moved towards the walls of Fez.

V.

It was dawn in the courtyard of the Kasbah. Othman had returned in great excitement.

“That’s all right,” he told himself. “Let me think, let me think. Have I done everything? Been to the camp of the Mahdi when I was sent to the Kaid of Thingamy—good. Saw my sweet little Asma—good. Kissed her—very good. Told her to watch for the light—just so. Fixed it myself on top of the Bab Toot—right. Got old Sweet-tooth, the porter, to open the gate—right once more. Bribe Hamid, the gaoler, liberated Otba, set him to remove the fetters of the prisoners as fast as the key will



open them—just so, right, good again. Hulloa! hulloa! hulloa!”

A little man came running through the courtyard. It was Jellalli, the poet, and he was radiant.

“What? Out of bed already?” said Othman.

“Out of bed?” said Jellalli, scornfully. “Should think so, little brother. Wouldn’t miss it for worlds.”

“Wouldn’t miss what?”

“The sight of the Mahdi when he’s brought in as a prisoner,” said Jellalli. “What did he say long ago?”—assuming a radiant air—“‘People of Fez,’ he said, ‘you shall yet bend the knee to me as to a king sent down from heaven—you shall, by Allah!’ Ha! ha! ha! That was how he was to enter Fez when he came back to it. Ha! ha! ha!” and the poet laughed immoderately.

“Then to think how he *will* come back,” said Jellalli, rubbing his hands. “Barefooted, half naked, riding a bony



old donkey, and the criers crying beside him, 'So shall it be done to every one who is—the brother of an ass!' Ha! ha! ha!"

Jellalli could not restrain his laughter. Othman joined him. "Ha! ha! ha! Funny, isn't it?" cried Othman.

"Funny?" said Jellalli. "I believe it will be the death of me."

"I believe it will," said Othman.

"A petticoat hung round his neck," said Jellalli, indicating hanging by a facetious gesture, "just to show that he tied himself to a woman's apron-strings and got his head entangled in them Ha! ha! ha! He'll be a sight for the saints."

"He will, he will," said Othman.

"It would be a pity to send him to prison," said Jellalli, still bursting with laughter; "he should be kept in the Sultan's museum as a standing cure for the spleen. I'll go there myself."

"You shall, you shall," said Othman.

"Oh, I've arranged it all," said Jel-



lalli, expansively ; “when he comes in on his donkey I’ll ride out on my horse. His envy will explode with spite——”

Jellalli stopped suddenly. There were sounds of music and cheering at the city gates.

“What’s that noise?” said the poet, uneasily.

Otba came behind him at the moment, slapped him on the back and answered, “The Mahdi on his donkey, of course.”

“What do you say?” said the poet from the depths of his throat.

The music and cheering increased. Othman began to mimic Jellalli. “Oh, he’ll be a sight for the saints. Come, let’s go out to meet him.”

“Who? I?” said the poet, growing pale.

“Yes, you,” said Othman. “His envy will explode with spite.”

“It would be my greatest pleasure in life, but—but——” stammered Jellalli.



Otba laid hold of him. "Then come on, little fire-eater," he said.

Othman dragged at him also and cried, "He'll be a standing cure for the spleen—come along."

"It would be my greatest pleasure in life," repeated Jellalli, "but—but ——"

Othman began to beat him. "You won't come? Then take *that* and *that* and *that*—for a liar and a cheat."

"And *that* too," said Otba, "you slave of sin," tearing off his tarboosh and leaving a bare poll. "And mind you don't catch cold."

"And that," cried Othman, tossing the poet's jellab over his head, "just for a petticoat round your poll."

Jellalli fled away, a ridiculous figure.

Some minutes afterwards Jonas Maliki came knocking at the door of the Basha's apartment. "Basha! My lord Basha! Basha!" he cried in a voice of fear.



“Who’s there?” said the Basha, half opening the door.

“It’s I,” said Jonas; “our men have betrayed us. The Mahdi has entered the city. The people in the streets are flocking to him like sheep. It’s ‘The Mahdi’ here—‘The Mahdi’ there—‘The Mahdi’ everywhere. The prisoners are at liberty. Our guard have laid down their arms. We can’t hold out an hour. Quick—we must fly.”

The Basha hesitated. “Let me fetch my money first,” he said.

“No time for that. You’ll be lost,” said the Jew.

“Come then—this way—down the sewers,” said the Basha, drawing his hood over his head.

## VI.

The sunrise was gilding the minarets of the mosques as the Mahdi returned



to Fez. Women with uncovered faces crowded the house-tops. Men and boys thronged the streets. A line of girls playing tambourines met the Mahdi near to the gate, and went before him as he walked. There were shouting and cheering, and the "Coo—o—oo!" that is the hurrah of the East. The Basha had gone. Fez, the last stronghold, had fallen. The old order was at an end.

As the Mahdi passed through the streets the people knelt to him. He touched the heads of some as a sign of forgiveness, and waved his hand to others as an answer to their salutations. His triumph was their triumph, the triumph of people, the triumph of woman, the triumph of the West over the East. It was also the conquest of Morocco for the Moors.

Soldiers went backwards before him, waving long staffs, and crying, "Room for my lord; room, room!" Boobker



walked behind. Fatima and Asma walked behind Boobker.

"Are all safe?" said the Mahdi.

"All," said Boobker.

"And Rachel?"

"She is coming."

"Praise to the Merciful! And little Hosein?"

"The child is with her."

"And my soldiers?"

"Not a soul is lost."

"God is great," said the Mahdi.

When he reached the Sōk el Fōki the morning sun dipped down on him. The concourse there was very great. He walked slowly, smiling and saluting, until he came to the house with the balcony. Then he stopped for a moment. It had been the scene of his greatest humiliation. It was now the scene of his greatest conquest.

There was a commotion coming from the direction of the Kasbah. Presently Otba came into the market place, bring-



ing as prisoners the Basha and Jonas the Jew.

“Two sewer rats, my lord,” said Otba.  
“I caught them in the drains.”

The Basha and Jonas cast themselves at the Mahdi's feet.

“Forgive me, Mahdi,” said the Basha.

“Forgive me, Sultan,” said Jonas.

The Mahdi touched their heads. “You were in the wrong, my brothers,” he said. “You were treacherous and cruel; but when a man has conquered it becomes his glory to forgive—and I forgive you. Go!”

Then Othman came dragging in Jellalli, with bare shaven poll.

“Another of them,” shouted Othman. “He was running a race out of the city on the back of a donkey.”

Jellalli grovelled, with his face at the Mahdi's slippers, and cried: “Mercy, O prophet of God, mercy! The truth is, I was galloping to the gate to welcome you on your return to Fez.”



“Jellalli,” said the Mahdi, “you suffer from a great infirmity. You should seek a change of climate, Jellalli.”

Jellalli lifted his face. “I will, my lord ; trust me, I will lose no time.”

“Take him away,” said the Mahdi.

The Mahdi looked up at the big house. Little Hosein came running out. The Mahdi stooped and touched the boy’s forehead with his lips. A moment later Rachel followed him with downcast eyes. She tried to kneel to the Mahdi, but he took her into his arms and embraced her tenderly.

The girls played ; the women on the house-tops made their ululation : the men on the market-place shouted their welcome.

“My people,” said the Mahdi, “on this spot our journey ends. Fez has fallen, and Barbary is free. Truth has come and falsehood has fled before the sword. The night is gone, and look !



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the day has dawned. The face of Allah shine on you for ever."

"Long live the Mahdi!" cried the people.

But Omar Benani was seen in Morocco no more.

THE END.















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